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BELGIUM  
The Making of a Nation

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# BELGIUM

## The Making of a Nation

BY

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## PREFACE

SOME thirty years ago, Ernest Lavisse, in answer to a request from some Belgian students, recalled in a picturesque and suggestive summary the chief events of Belgian history, and declared to his young correspondents, 'I know of no land which possesses more glorious memories than yours'. His words at once expressed his warm sympathy with them and emphasized the prominence of the part played by Belgium in European history. The words of the eminent historian came back to my memory in the early days of the war. Belgium has shown herself worthy of her glorious past ; she has added one more to those many heroic pages which her annals contain.

I may, perhaps, be accused of having dwelt too little on those pages. I have done so on purpose, first from motives of discretion and secondly from scientific scruples. The grave preoccupations of the present hour do not dispense us from the demands of historical truth. We must not imitate the historians on the other side of the Rhine in making the great lines of the past converge towards the point of view which our present frame of mind imposes on us. There is a risk of distorting their perspective in seeking to 'predict' as it were past events, that is to say seeking to estimate their importance by the measure of those which we see before us, to determine their significance by the consequences which have resulted from them, and to appreciate the former solely in the light of the latter. History does not lend itself to such a system of final causes ; the method savours too much of Prussian organization.

To say the truth, it is by no means easy to free oneself from the tyrannous obsession of the present, to escape from the atmosphere of fever or exaltation in which we live, and which impels us to regard Belgium as the pivot of European evolution. No land, it is true, possesses a more international history—a fact which has been brought out with wonderful skill by Henri Pirenne—and it is not paradoxical to assert that one of the characteristics of Belgian nationality is internationalism. While bearing these results in mind as scientifically true, I have devoted myself to the task of finding out the ruling factors of our internal history, and selecting by preference as the landmarks of different periods, not the changes which, resulting in general from European conflicts, have affected the reigning houses, but the distinctive phenomena of social life. In common with the other States of the West, Belgium only achieved political consistency in the fifteenth century, but her national character was formed during the course of the Middle Ages, and if I have not laid more stress upon that period it is because its history is still enveloped in the mists of legends.

I hesitated for some time before writing this book, being convinced that the tragic moments through which we are passing render it difficult to attain that calm of mind which is essential for the execution of all historical work. However, I am now placed in a relatively favourable situation for the performance of such a task, thanks to the isolation of exile, and thanks also to the bibliographical resources of a university town, where I have found a generous welcome and where the echoes of the terrible conflict reach me more faintly. By undertaking this sketch, I have endeavoured to serve my native land intellectually without failing to observe all those duties of

honesty and impartiality which that service demands. I have tried to condense and to popularize the results of the chief works on the history of Belgium. I have more particularly endeavoured to bring out the essential characteristics of the different phases which that history presents, to show that each of these phases demands a special way of viewing it. In this way we shall better perceive the causes which have made the Belgium of to-day the land of refuge and of liberty *par excellence*, and the Belgian people the unyielding protagonists of the ideas of justice and honour—those imponderables so much ignored now by the Germans—which reach lands beyond the range of their guns.

OXFORD, FEBRUARY 9, 1918.

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## I

# *From the Earliest Times to the Period of the Carolingians*

### *i. The Roman Conquest*

THE very name of Belgium is still a problem. At the epoch of the Roman conquest, when it first appears in history, it had already been long in use, and was then applied to a very extensive territory—all that district of Gaul which lay between the Rhine and the Seine valley. The tribe, or collection of tribes, which first adopted the name and which spread its use over the surrounding area, is unidentified; authorities are agreed in regarding it as Celtic in character, although its exact origin is unknown. The predominant element in the Belgian population has then always been Celtic or largely intermingled with Celts; the final immigration of that tall and fair-haired race, which took place about the third century before Christ, absorbed or expelled the earlier peoples, those Celts, Ligurians, and others who doubtless erected the dolmens—megalithic monuments thought to be burial-places. A remnant of the conquered race sought refuge in the forest districts, where their form of worship existed side by side with that of the Celts, whose funeral rites were marked by the building of mounds. Some German groups had joined themselves to the Celtic tribes, and appear to have been in great measure assimilated.

Belgic Gaul was far from being a united whole when it was invaded by the legions of Caesar in 57 B.C. The chief tribes inhabiting it were settled on the two great routes which in all ages have been the commercial and strategic roads from the

Rhine to the Seine and which passed through the most open and fertile districts. The more northern of the two routes was controlled by the Eburones (Hesbaye), the Nervii (Brabant, Hainault, Cambr sis), the Atrebates (Artois), and the Bellovaci (Beauvaisis), while the Treviri, Remi, and Suessiones dominated the route of the Moselle, Marne, and Aisne. In this region Treves, Reims, and Soissons, the three chief centres of population, grew up.

Between the Ardennes and the sea the most powerful tribes were the Eburones (Tongres) and the Nervii (Bavay); they very largely controlled their neighbours, the Condrusi (Candroz), the Paemani (Famenne), the Aduatici (Namur), and the rest, these three tribes being, like the Eburones, mingled with a considerable German element. To the west and north the Morini (Boulonnais and Calaisis) and the Menapii (Flanders and the Campine), protected by their marshes and forests, preserved a greater measure of independence, and by their essentially Celtic character afforded a contrast with the Batavi, a German people settled in the delta of the Scheldt and Meuse.

At the approach of Caesar (57 B.C.), the majority of the Belgic tribes formed a league, with the exception of the great tribe of the Remi, who submitted immediately. The first conflict took place on the Aisne; the Belgae were forced to retreat before the superior arms, discipline, and military skill of the invaders. The Nervii, led by Boduognatus, encamped with two neighbouring tribes on the banks of the Sambre, at Hautmont near Maubeuge. Caesar began the construction of a camp opposite that of the natives, but being surprised, he would have been overwhelmed had it not been for the courage and decision with which he rallied his soldiers. After a fearful struggle, in which both sides suffered heavy loss, all the warriors of Boduognatus, with the exception of some hundreds, were killed. Caesar availed himself of the oppor-



tunity to lay siege to the fortress of the Aduatici (Namur), who had not been in time to join the Nervii. The place was reduced without difficulty and the defenders were sold into slavery, but a large number effected their escape. Finally Caesar concluded a treaty with the Eburones, who feigned submission.

In the following year (56 B.C.) Caesar was less fortunate in his attempt to conquer the territory of the Morini. He tried in vain to force them to a pitched battle and to dislodge them from their forests and marshes. He even burned a part of their woods, but the autumn rains compelled him to retreat.

In 54 B.C. an almost universal revolt broke out, under the leadership of Ambiorix, one of the two kings of the Eburones. After pretending to submit, he employed against the invader all the resources of his active mind and his redoubtable energy. The fortress of Tongres, solidly constructed by the Romans, appeared to him to be impregnable, and he therefore had recourse to a simple stratagem, by which he succeeded in inducing the garrison to leave it, causing the officers who commanded there to believe that they were about to be attacked by hosts of Germans and persuading them to retire to the nearest Roman camp. While the legionaries were passing through the valley of the Geer, Ambiorix suddenly attacked them and annihilated them. He attempted the same plan with the Roman camp in the district of the Nervii (possibly Binche), but in vain, and was forced to have recourse to a regular siege. Caesar hastened to the rescue and relieved the fort. In the following year the Roman general devoted himself solely to the work of taking vengeance. After having handed over to his troops the territory of the Nervii, which was entirely laid waste, the crops and cattle being carried off and the men taken as slaves, Caesar defeated the Treviri at Izel on the Semois and then formed the plan of surrounding

the lands of Ambiorix with a continuous circle of enemies. He ravaged the district of the Menapii, reached the Rhine, and then wreaked his rage on the land which had produced 'the criminal brood'. He organized a regular series of battues in order to discover Ambiorix, who had taken refuge in the Ardennes, and invited the tribes inhabiting the districts bordering on the Eburones to share in the plunder of that race. After that he fancied that he had subdued the greater part of the Belgae, and calculated that he would soon effect the capture of Ambiorix and his little band of fugitives. He was mistaken. When Gaul rose in rebellion under the leadership of Vercingetorix, a large number of Belgic tribes, the Eburones at their head, roused by Ambiorix, and the Atrebatas, led by Comm, took up arms again. Caesar, however, succeeded in repressing this rising and for a second time handed over the land of the Eburones to fire and sword (51 B.C.). Of all the Gauls, the Belgae were the last to submit.

The tribes which formerly inhabited the territory of Belgium proper were divided into four civitates or districts, which included the whole of that country: the Menapii, Nervii, Tungri (who replaced the Eburones), and the Treviri. The respective capitals of these districts were Cassel, replaced in the fourth century by Tournai, Bavay, Tongres, and Treves, but only this last town, thanks to the existence there of a Roman colony, acquired the character of a capital. Each district enjoyed a large measure of autonomy and was obliged only to furnish contingents to the army and subsidies. The contingents were raised by a voluntary system, and the Belgic veterans, when they eventually returned to their homes, rapidly spread the manners and ideas of Rome, and promoted sentiments of affection for the Queen of the World. Except on the frontier of the Rhine, the Roman garrison was not large, and local order was maintained by a municipal police, drawn from the inhabi-

tants of the district. Even Tongres was only lightly garrisoned. On all sides the Romanizing influence spread, proceeding especially along the military roads, which had been built in the days of the conquest, because they served also as routes for commerce. From Reims and from Cologne numerous roads radiated towards the Meuse and the Scheldt, furnished with boundary marks and post-houses and forming a great network of communications. The main highway which united these two vital centres passed through Bavay, Tongres, and Maastricht, while another important road ran by way of Arlon and Treves. From Bavay started the main road to the sea, which it reached at Boulogne. Among subsidiary routes, that from Bavay to Treves through Dinant may be mentioned ; certain remains of this road, such as the bridge of Montignies-Saint-Christophe, are wonderfully preserved at the present day. Another noteworthy road was that from Arlon to Tongres through Bastogne and Marche, which in the Middle Ages was known as ' the Devil's Causeway '. Roman merchants first established themselves in shanties near the camps, and then, having grown rich by trade, acquired lands and formed a new aristocracy side by side with the old native nobility.

In addition to this network of roads, a further network of river routes equally aided the Roman penetration of the country. The rivers, generally sluggish, formed admirable means of communication : the Meuse united the district of Tongres with the modern Holland and with the Ardennes, while the Sambre and the system of the Scheldt and its tributaries assisted to bring the country of the Nervii into relations with the neighbouring regions.

Industrial and commercial activity, which had been considerable prior to the Roman period, increased after the conquest. The alluvial or sandy and alluvial zone lying between the moors of the Campin and the forests of the Ardennes was very rich

in cereals, supplying foodstuffs even to the Rhine country, and stock-raising also assumed great proportions in that district. The salt marshes of the lands of the Menapii and the Morini, and the woods of these districts, with their herds of swine, were largely exploited, and there came salt meats, such as the famous Menapian hams, which were exported even to Rome; the geese of these districts were appreciated by Italian epicures. As a result of the cultivation of flax in the same area, a flourishing cloth industry sprang up, and the flocks of sheep supplied a coarse and durable wool which served excellently for the making of the cloth of Arras, Treves, Tournai, &c.; the cloaks manufactured in these towns were sold even in the Asiatic markets. Thanks to the occurrence of iron ore and to the forests of the Ardennes, the furnaces and forges of the district produced from early times iron weapons—swords, spears, lances, daggers, javelin points—as well as tools and various utensils. The Romans perfected the process of manufacture by substituting charcoal for wood; the western extension of the Ardennes even became known as the Charcoal Forest.

The introduction of the Roman manner of life revolutionized the whole aspect of the country. In place of wattled huts and wood cabins the richer members of the community built themselves villas, partly of brick or stone, heated by means of underground furnaces, furnished with glass windows, provided with bath-rooms, larders, arcades on their southern side, and adorned with mosaics, frescoes, and marbles. The ruins which remain (Basse-Wavre, Anthée, &c.) are inadequate for the purpose of enabling us to reconstruct all the opulence of this period. Jewels, vases, and other valuables are found only in the tombs, generally buried in the mounds. Ease and luxury changed the diet of the people; new dishes and southern fruits, some of which were acclimatized (cherries, raisins, peaches, &c.), appeared on the tables of the wealthy, as well as wine and olive-oil.



Intellectual advance became more rapid as a result of the spread of education and the introduction of Latin, the language of the merchants and soldiers. The Celtic tongue disappeared. Manners were changed, and Celtic traditions were combined with Roman beliefs. Esus was identified with Mercury, Entarabus and Teutates with Mars, though the mother goddesses, personifying Fortune, the giver of prosperity, continued to be the object of fervent popular adoration, while Epona was always the tutelar genius of horses and horsemen, and Nehallenia that of navigation. Ancient religious observances subsisted; at the summer solstice, fires were lighted in the fields to maintain the energy of the sun, the 'celestial wheel', and the streams and groves were peopled with fairies, elves, &c. The forest of the Ardennes preserved its divine character as the domain of a mysterious huntress. Oriental religions, with their astrological elements, spread rapidly; the divinities of the planets were united with the local divinities, and thus was introduced the institution of the week, each day of which was dedicated to a 'planet'.

As early as the third century, Christianity, which in the next century became the State religion of the empire, began to make progress in the south and the east of the country. The first bishop was probably established at Treves, and in the middle of the fourth century Saint Servais founded the episcopal seat of Tongres. The capitals of the other districts became in their turn the sees of bishops, but the work of conversion in these areas was slow, and was everywhere suddenly interrupted by the imminence of the German peril.

### *ii. The Immigration of the Franks*

For a considerable period, as has been seen, Germans had been introduced into the country, and sometimes in comparatively compact groups, but any wholesale immigration

was prevented by the organization of the Rhine frontier. From the reign of Augustus, the province of Germania Inferior, with Cologne as its capital, existed for the defence of this frontier, and it absorbed, with other places, the city of Tongres. In the middle of the third century the military frontier of the empire was of necessity contracted as a result of the increasing pressure of the Germans. The Franks and the Alamanni forced the legions to fall back towards the Meuse, despite the camps and fortresses which had been constructed along the great roads. Arlon, Tongres, and possibly Namur were surrounded with walls. In 276 the great inroad of the barbarians occurred. The rich houses of the province were pillaged or burned; their inhabitants were massacred or enslaved; the fields were ravaged and the towns sacked. The area between the Meuse and the Scheldt experienced the unenviable lot of frontier districts.

The emperors found only one means of saving the State, that of opposing barbarian to barbarian, and they allowed the Franks to establish themselves in the wasted country of the Morini and Treviri. The coast districts were vigorously defended, but the Franks and Saxons could not be prevented from establishing themselves there in considerable numbers. At the close of the third century, availing themselves of the revolt of Carausius, who had been appointed to guard the littoral, the Salian Franks seized the island of the Batavi. From that moment they secured a valuable base of operations, and about the middle of the next century, in spite of the ill-success of their attacks, they received from the Emperor Julian permission to colonize Texandria (Campine). At the beginning of the fifth century, they spread in an irresistible flood over the whole northern part of the country, and, skirting the edge of the Forêt Charbonnière, turned towards Tournai (431), while the Ripuarian Franks advanced to the

banks of the Meuse, along the northern fringe of the Ardennes, passed the river, and colonized the country as far as the moors of the Campine. Some Frisians, mingled perhaps with some Saxons, invaded maritime Flanders, and the Alamanni advanced to the eastern border of the Ardennes. In the recesses of the Forêt Charbonnière and of the Ardennes alone the Romanized Belgæ or Walloons maintained themselves. From that time the linguistic map of the country was definitely fixed. As the forest was cleared, Franks and Walloons came into contact ; their relations became increasingly frequent, and they hence partook of the same political and social evolution.

Between the Ardennes and the Forêt Charbonnière, Roman civilization was preserved almost intact ; it was only seriously impaired in the invaded districts, and even there it did not entirely disappear. The Church revived it, though its most active centres tended to draw back to the south. Tongres lost its position as the chief place of the diocese, being replaced by Maastricht in the sixth century, and at a later date, in the eighth century, Liège, Cassel, and Bavay having been destroyed, Tournai and Cambrai became the seats of the dioceses or cities of the Menapii and Nervii. Tournai, however, fell into the hands of the Franks, and its see was combined with that of Noyon until the middle of the eleventh century. As far as possible the Church preserved Roman institutions ; she adopted the old political divisions, and thus the district lying between the Ardennes and the sea was divided into four dioceses : Liège, a suffragan see of Cologne, and Cambrai, Tournai, and Têrouanne, suffragans of Reims. These dioceses supplied the basis of the numerous political partitions effected by the Frankish kings.

The legends which surround this period of history are so numerous as to render the discovery of the truth impossible. Nothing certain is known about such kings as Clodion and

Meroveus, and the latter appears to have been a mythical personage. As for Childeric, who died in 481, he showed great activity in the region of the Loire, and his favourite residence was probably Tournai, since it is there that the tomb was discovered in which he was buried with his war-horse, arms, and jewels.

Cambrai and other cities were also royal residences, but they were much decayed at this period, rural life having everywhere secured the ascendancy. Everywhere in the territory of the Franks, farms, isolated rather than grouped in villages, arose, the ruins of the Roman villas supplying the materials for their construction. Municipal life disappeared even in the Walloon region, and the whole area between the sea and the Ardennes was desolated by the constantly recurring wars between the many Frankish kingdoms, divided or disputed on each change of ruler. Clovis by stratagem and violence reunited them, and even extended the dominion of the Franks over almost all ancient Gaul. He and his vassals submitted more or less to the influence of Roman civilization, so firmly established from the Seine southwards, and he resided for choice at Paris, whence he was able to keep watch at once over the old Frankish territories of the north and his new conquests.

His conversion to Catholicism (496) had no immediate effect on his territories ; the true Frankish land, that country which the Franks had colonized north of the Lys and the Forêt Charbonnière, long remained faithful to its ancient creeds, and the protection accorded by Clovis, for example, to Saint Vaast, Bishop of Arras, hardly assisted the spreading of Christianity in this region. In every case the successors of Clovis made the bishops the instruments of their greed and of their absolutism, by frequently raising laymen to episcopal office. The Church became disorganized in the course of this period, during which, to use the expression of Gregory of Tours,



barbarism was unchained ; many prelates were turbulent warriors, famous hunters, but inferior pastors.

The ancient laws, such as the Salic Law, which was codified in the reign of Clovis and which was introduced into the Walloon as well as into the Frankish districts, were powerless to prevent bloody quarrels, which were always numerous, despite the heavy penalties, sometimes inhuman in their severity, which were inflicted on the disturbers of the public peace. The law bore hardly upon those of inferior rank, while allowing the rich to compound with a money payment for their wrongdoing. The various branches of the royal house set an example of every type of crime and of private revenge. Many of the most dramatic scenes occurred at Tournai or in its neighbourhood. There often resided Fredegonde, the second wife of Chilperic, who introduced the 'habit of king-killing'. She it was who armed the murderers of Sigebert, King of Austrasia, the conqueror of her husband ; they slew him at the moment when the nobles of Neustria were raising him on the shield.

### *iii. The Carolingian Epoch*

Strictly speaking, the Carolingian epoch begins only with the accession of the dynasty of that name, in 751, when Pepin the Short was elected King of the Franks at Soissons. As a matter of fact, the ancestors of Pepin had ruled as Mayors of the Palace in Austrasia or East Francia from the beginning of the seventh century, and in Neustria or West Francia from 687. Accordingly, at least as far as Belgium is concerned, it is necessary to include in the Carolingian period a large part of the Merovingian, that confused and tragic time, in which, however, the elements of a new political and social order sprang up, that of Mediaeval Europe, based on religious unity and on the collaboration of the temporal and spiritual powers, represented by two distinct heads.

It has been said that Carolingian civilization was essentially European. Since the regions of the Meuse and Scheldt formed the heart of the Carolingian Empire, this remark may be qualified by saying that the civilization was essentially Belgic. It was developed on the great estates of the lay aristocracy, at the head of which stood the family of Pepin or the Carolingians, and, above all, on the great monastic estates. The abbeys played a predominant part, and they were situated mainly in the Walloon region, which was strongly infected by the Roman tradition—Saint-Vaast of Arras, Saint-Bertin, and Saint-Omer, Elnone (afterwards Saint-Amand), Saint-Martin of Tournai, Lobbes, Sainte-Waudru of Mons, Sainte-Gertrude of Nivelles, and many others, rapidly rose to prosperity, thanks to the benefactions of wealthy landowners eager to secure the remission of their sins.

It was specially monks from the south of Gaul who undertook the conversion of the real Frankish territory and founded there at this time the first monasteries. Saint Amand, the enthusiastic Aquitanian apostle, did not hesitate to enter the district of Ghent, reputed savage and dangerous, and he there founded about 610 the first abbey in the Salian country, Saint-Peter at Ghent, after having destroyed the pagan temples and their idols. In his impetuous zeal he advised King Clotaire to have recourse to compulsory baptism, a proceeding which produced revolts, and then, being discouraged thereby, he abandoned this unreceptive country for the banks of the Danube. At a later date, however, he reappeared in the neighbourhood of Tournai, where he founded the monastery of Elnone, which afterwards bore his name; he abandoned the diocese of Tongres, at the head of which he had been placed, as he could not accustom himself to the roughness and ignorance of his barbarous clergy. The work of Saint Amand was taken up by compatriots of his, Saint Eloi in the sees of Tournai

and Cambrai, and Saint Remachus in that of Tongres. The latter about the middle of the seventh century built the twin abbeys of Malmédy and Stavelot in the solitudes of the Ardennes ; he threw down the monuments of the goddess of this forest and planted crosses at the sacred springs. But the conversion of the country of the Franks was only completed at the beginning of the following century in the time of Saint Lambert and Saint Hubert. The latter destroyed the relics of the old Teutonic faith, the memory of which is preserved in legends such as that of the ' Hunter ', doubtless Odin or Wodin, who ranged the woods with his pack of hounds.

The ecclesiastical foundations of this period, which owed their existence mainly to the monks, were not devoted solely to religious purposes, nor did the regular clergy themselves live an essentially contemplative life. The abbeys were then true workshops and model farms and played an active part in the everyday life of the people, with the result that they possessed a partially secular character. Many of the abbots were largely occupied with temporal affairs, directing their vast estates, which were continually increased by generous donations and which were often coveted by the lay aristocracy and by the kings. Their constant tendency was to free themselves from episcopal jurisdiction and to become what were known as exempt abbeys. Each abbot ruled a little world of his own, a world which was almost self-supporting. Its essential feature was the church with the cloister, generally near it ; around it were grouped the common rooms, the school and the library, the refectory and the dormitory, while beyond these extended the quarters of the abbot, the guest-rooms, and the hospital. The houses, occupied by tenants and serfs, were partly in the midst of the neighbouring fields and vineyards, partly scattered further away. The abbot often had control of some thousands of agriculturists, and of men engaged

in cattle-raising, in all kinds of industry, and sometimes in commerce.

In every manifestation of social activity the influence of the abbeys was decisive. Their schools were the chief centres of intellectual life, and Charlemagne had recourse mainly to them in order to create that which he called the new Athens, the Athens of Christ, devoted to the study of letters in preparation for the study of the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures. The care with which the monks decorated their churches, with mural paintings amongst other things, assisted to raise the level of taste. But artistic works of this period were generally anonymous; the only painter's name which is preserved is that of Madalulf, described by his contemporaries as a remarkable artist of the diocese of Cambrai.

The monks also played a foremost part in politics. It will be seen that under Charlemagne those to whom the government was entrusted came not from the ranks of the episcopate but from those of the regular clergy. The emperor had recourse especially to the strangers who came to the monasteries of his empire, such as Einhard, who although a layman received many abbeys, amongst others those of Saint-Peter and Saint-Bavon at Ghent.

The direction of policy, however, was determined by other factors than the monastic elements; notably by the lay aristocracy, composed solely of great landowners, since at this time land constituted the sole form of wealth. At the head of this aristocracy were the Mayors of the Palace, who became greater landowners than the kings themselves whom they eventually supplanted. The family of Pepin and Charles, which monopolized this office, disposed of vast domains in the fertile Hesbaye, along the Meuse, and in the Ardennes. Like other lords, they tended to secure direct control of the inhabitants of these districts to the detriment of royal authority. It is doubtful



whether the predominance of this family should be attributed mainly to the military success of such leaders as Charles Martel, the victor of Poitiers, and Pepin the Short, the conqueror of Aquitaine. There is no doubt that martial glory assisted the development of their fortune, but in that development an important part was also played by their practical ability and that talent for organization which appeared so clearly in Charlemagne. Charlemagne was certainly less a lawgiver than an administrator of the first order. He allowed the various peoples of his dominions to keep their respective laws, and the Salic Law remained the basis of Frankish legislation. But he brought all the peoples under the same system of administration, that of the counts, the bishops, and the *missi*.

Charlemagne did this most effectively in the Belgic district, which formed the real heart of his empire and where his patrimony lay. Certain institutions, such as that of the tribunal of aldermen, flourished there with extraordinary vigour and were preserved until the close of modern times. In this area, too, he was able to apply with success those reforms which tended to the religious unity of his empire, which he wished to convert into a species of 'City of God', while retaining in his own hands the nomination of the higher dignitaries. Here also flourished what is known as the Carolingian renaissance, the principal centres of which were the monasteries which Charlemagne specially favoured. The schools of Liège and Saint-Amand shone with a particular lustre which survived the decline of the Carolingians. The Irish monk, Sedulius, contributed to the fame of the schools of Liège by his knowledge of sacred and profane literature. The diocese itself was one of the first to reap the benefits of Carolingian legislation concerning the spread of learning; it is thanks to a circular of Bishop Gerbald that the care with

which Charlemagne watched over the studies of the clergy is known.

The memory of Carolingian times is perpetuated in many parts of the district of Hesbaye, in the country of the Meuse, and most of all in the Ardennes, and the legends which have grown up around that energetic and wise leader of men, Charlemagne, enjoyed there an extraordinary vogue. Roland, the Chevalier Bayard, and the four sons of Aymon, all the fabulous personages of the *Gestes*, have haunted the popular imagination of the regions in which Charlemagne and his house found originally the sources of their power and where they were in consequence most beloved. In the district of Liège the authorship of the Frankish customary law was soon attributed to him, and until modern times it was known as 'the law of Charlemagne'. He was eventually converted into the founder of the commune of Liège, to which he was said to have granted 'letters sealed with gold' and to have presented the famous standard of Saint Lambert.

## *Foundation and Development of the Principalities up to the Thirteenth Century*

### *i. The Decline of the Carolingians. Flanders and Lotharingia form Military Frontiers*

THE ideal of Charlemagne—the foundation of a Christian empire, based on religious unity and including all the countries of the West—was never realized, and even those districts which he had united under his sceptre were dismembered soon after his death (814). The Belgic land contributed more than any other to the decadence of the Carolingians. Feudalism began there earlier than elsewhere and became more anarchic than in other places, whereby the nobles secured a reputation for turbulence and incredible savagery. At the same time, serious conflicts early arose there on the question of the lands owned by the bishops and abbots, that ecclesiastical aristocracy which had become so powerful in the period of Charlemagne.

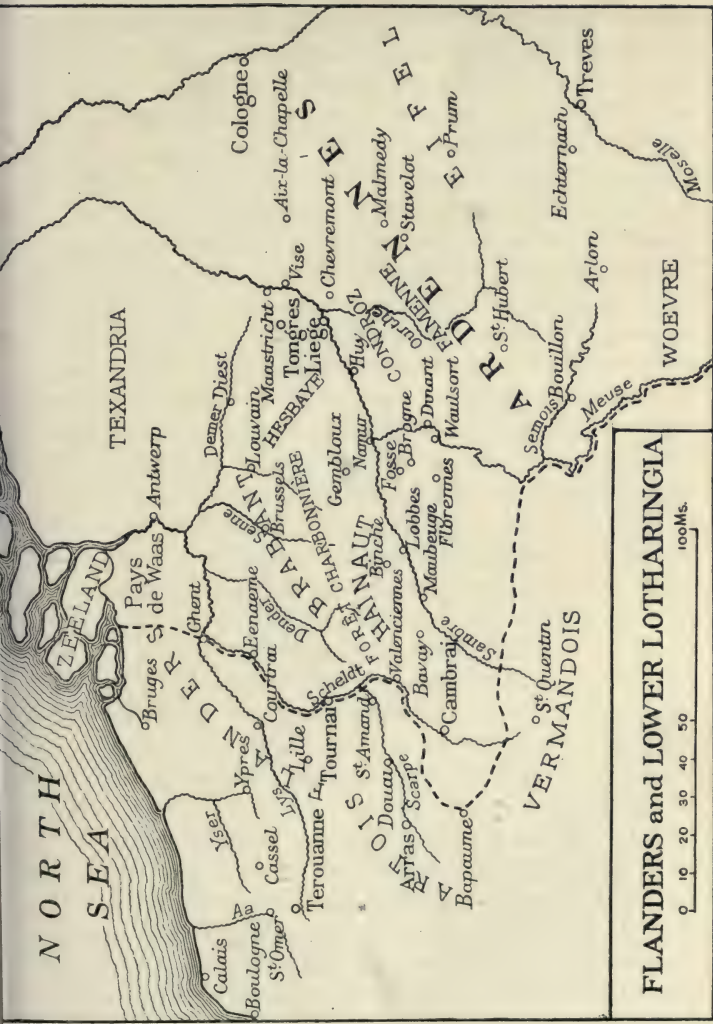
Finally, there were two other causes of dissolution which worked more deeply here than in the rest of the Carolingian empire: the feeble character of Louis the Pious, Charlemagne's son, and the invasions of the Northmen. Numerous divisions followed, and so many readjustments of territory that an abbot of Ferrières (near Soissons) in a letter to one of his colleagues characterized the situation of his abbey in the following terms: 'We are in an ambiguous position here. We drift uncertainly; it is impossible for us to discover the rightful ruler of this region.' A great many Belgian abbots could have said the same. Treaties succeeded treaties, conflicts

continually rose again between the grandsons of Charlemagne, and if the Treaty of Verdun (843) was ultimately deemed more important than the rest, it was solely because its provisions were most often appealed to by the founders of the two great states of Mediaeval Europe: France or the West Franks, and Germany or the East Franks.

The authors of the partition of Verdun acted without the slightest consideration for nations or languages, without the slightest concern as to natural or traditional boundaries; their main idea was to hold the balance more or less equal between the three sovereigns while taking into account their personal interests, and they succeeded neither in giving cohesion to their respective states nor in maintaining the unity of the empire. The region situated on the left bank of the Scheldt reverted to Charles the Bald, while all the territory which stretched on the right of that river went to the emperor, Lothaire I. This last region became afterwards part of the kingdom of Lothaire II, or Lotharingia, which stretched from the North Sea to the Jura and from France to the Rhine. Although a bone of contention between the kings of France and Germany, it maintained a strong individuality, and in 895 was actually constituted an independent kingdom by Arnulf of Carinthia in favour of his natural son, Zwentibold. When Henry of Saxony definitely attached it to Germany (925), it formed a duchy with extremely pronounced autonomous tendencies.

Despite political instability the springs of wealth were not dried up; in any case they remained there more abundant than in the other western countries. They were not seriously reduced until the second half of the ninth century by the disturbances resulting from the incursions of the Northmen. The maritime districts were the first to fall into the power of the Scandinavian warriors. They settled themselves from





834 in the principal harbours at the mouths of the Meuse, the Rhine, and the Scheldt, sometimes under the pretext of trade (all merchants were armed in those days, so that it was hard to distinguish them from warriors). They pillaged the port of Duurstede four times in succession and destroyed Utrecht after carrying off the treasures of her churches. In 850 Lothaire II, unable to repulse them, ceded the country of the Waal as a fief to one of their chiefs, and in 882 Charles the Fat similarly invested another Northman king with Frisia. Once in possession of that extensive maritime base, the Northmen ventured on a series of raids into the interior. Their fleet occasionally co-operated with their land army, but was more frequently employed to collect their booty and to serve as a base of supplies. The army of the Northmen, well equipped and disciplined, was principally composed of cavalry, which accounted for the astonishing rapidity of its movements. At one and the same time it pillaged and devastated the country round the Meuse and the Scheldt, and it selected for choice lands which were rich in corn and forage and which also contained the most flourishing abbeys and the most frequented markets. In 881 it sacked Saint-Vaast at Arras and Cambrai, and about the same time constructed a camp at Elsloo, near Maastricht, from which it extended its operations across the whole of the Hesbaye and the country of Liège. Maastricht, Tongres, Liège, Saint-Trond, Aix-la-Chapelle, Malmédy, and Stavelot became a prey to the Northmen, while their populations fled distracted, ruined by depredations and burnings. Shortly afterwards the army of the Northmen entered the region of the Somme and selected Amiens as its head-quarters. Carloman, King of the West Franks, purchased their retreat (884). One part of this army then crossed to England; the other fell upon Flanders and Brabant and established its head-quarters at Louvain, the western extremity of the Hesbaye, the great fertility of

which the Northmen appreciated; they were able to concentrate at leisure all their booty in the camp of Louvain, which, situated at the passage of the Dyle, commanded a great part of the Hesbaye and Brabant.

They were so firmly established there that when, in 885, Charles the Fat sent against them the combined forces of the West Franks and Lotharingia, they offered a victorious resistance. From 886 to 890 their incursions were mainly directed against the West Franks, but in 891 they again invaded the Hesbaye. They inflicted a serious check on the army of the Archbishop of Mayence on the banks of the Geule, near their former camp of Elsloo, and once more made Louvain their head-quarters and base of supplies. There they were attacked by the army of Arnulf, King of the East Franks and of Lotharingia, and suffered a defeat of some seriousness, though it was indecisive (891), for they were not prevented from reinstalling themselves at Louvain immediately afterwards. They did not make up their minds to leave the banks of the Dyle until the following year, after having once more ravaged as far as the banks of the Rhine, and the districts of the Eifel and the Ardennes. Their departure was really due to a famine which raged that year and compelled them to go over to England, and not to their defeat in 891, which was grossly exaggerated by chroniclers of that period interested in exalting the renown of Arnulf, and by modern German historians who were anxious to find in the battle of Louvain a title of glory for German royalty. The settlement of the Northmen in England and Normandy delivered Lotharingia and Flanders henceforward from the danger of fresh attempts on their part.

Nevertheless, security did not return: monasteries and castles assumed more and more the aspect of fortresses, and even the churches protected themselves by massive towers. The chaos only increased; each noble, from the security of his donjon,

defied the royal authority, waged private war or devoted himself to robbery, shamelessly exploiting the population of the neighbourhood by imposing forced labour and all kinds of exactions upon them. Lotharingia, unceasingly disputed by the sovereigns of the two kingdoms between which it lay, suffered particularly from this splitting up of territory and power.

The only Belgic district which, from the twelfth century, acquired a certain measure of political cohesion was Flanders. The Baldwin dynasty succeeded in uniting several counties and in steadily increasing its power, thanks to the unique position of the country in which its activities lay. Flanders, situated at the northern extremity of West Francia, was charged with the work of defending the line of the Scheldt. It was transformed into a military frontier and took the name of a marquisate, or frontier province. Baldwin I, surnamed *Bras-de-Fer*, established the grandeur of his dynasty by the victorious resistance which he offered to the Northmen. After having carried off Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, he threatened to unite with them, but a reconciliation was effected through the intervention of Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims, and of the Pope, which resulted in an increase of fortune and prestige for Baldwin. His son, Baldwin II, succeeded in enlarging the territory by the addition of Walloon Flanders and of Artois, the great wealth of which consisted in rich ecclesiastical domains.

Almost the whole region between the Gulf of Zwyn and the Canche was, from the beginning of the tenth century, under the authority of the Flemish marquises, whose prestige, in those days, eclipsed that of their suzerain. This was derived from the fact that they were obliged to keep a standing army to defend that northern point of West Francia. They used these forces for their own ends, and were the more readily



able to do so since the Frankish kingdom was distracted by the quarrels of the Carolingians and Capetians.

Lotharingia, or Mid-Francia, including the essential part of the Frankish territory, and above all the ancient Carolingian demesne lands, had been created in order to supply a territorial basis for the empire and to unite the East and West Frankish states. Its actual destiny was far different. It was split up, as a result of the feudal system, into a crowd of quasi-independent territories.

The lay aristocracy there offered a serious resistance to the ambitions of the rulers of the two rival Frankish states, later France and Germany, supporting itself on one or the other according to circumstances. The most typical representative of this aristocracy was Régnier. A kinsman of the Carolingian family, he possessed vast domains in the Ardennes, Hainault, Hesbaye, and on the Lower Meuse, and acquired the abbeys of Echternach, Stavelot, Malmédy, and Saint-Servais at Maastricht. He commanded thousands of serfs and some hundreds of vassals, both in the Flemish and in the Walloon districts. In opposition to Zwentibold, whose implacable foe he became, he maintained a policy of complete independence, and did not hesitate, in order to keep the Germans in check, to apply to Charles the Simple. Zwentibold in vain opposed the bishops of Lotharingia to him; he could not withstand the league of feudatories formed by Régnier, and fell himself in an obscure skirmish. His mysterious death led to his being for some while regarded as a saint, but the prestige of Régnier was not thereby diminished, and it was he who, as duke or marquis, practically governed Lotharingia after Zwentibold's death. When he died (915) his position was so securely established that his son Gisbert, still a child, succeeded him under the regency of his mother. The policy of Gisbert was also marked by frequent changes of attitude, but he could not

prevent Henry the Fowler from definitely establishing the suzerainty of the German monarchy in Lotharingia (925). He seized, however, the first favourable opportunity of attempting a rebellion. This occurred in the reign of Otto I, when a coalition was formed against that monarch by the feudal princes beyond the Rhine. Gisibert valiantly defended the cause of the Lotharingian aristocracy. Besieged in his castle of Chèvremont, near Liège, he succeeded in escaping and led his troops as far as the banks of the Rhine, but he was surprised by a superior force and was drowned in the river while attempting to ford it on horseback (939).

From that time, Otto, King of Germany, endeavoured to reduce Lotharingia by converting it into a military province and by conferring the dignity of duke on members of his own family: he commanded his brother, Bruno, Archbishop of Cologne, to assume the government of Lotharingia, to divide it into two distinct duchies (Upper and Lower Lotharingia), and to institute the system of the Germanic Church. This system consisted in transferring to bishops all the duties of the counts, so as to prevent these offices from becoming hereditary among the lay aristocracy—a possibility which had almost been realized by them. Consequently the nobles redoubled their efforts to check the policy of the Saxon emperors and instigated numerous risings against these bishops, who, being mostly Germans, were unable to gain the sympathy of the people, despite their talents and their reputation for learning and piety. Of these disturbances, one of the most violent occurred at Liège, during the episcopate of Eracle, the chief founder of the celebrated Cathedral School of that town: the mob invaded his palace and—says the chronicler—caused the Meuse to run red with his Worms wine.

Even such notable personalities as Notker (972–1008) were unable to obtain the acceptance of the Ottonian régime.

He secured himself by imposing military forces, and made Liège the strongest imperial fortress of Lower Lotharingia. He also continued there the work of Eracle with such success that this city earned the name of 'Athens of the North'; but the fame which he thus acquired was short-lived, and he was chiefly remembered as a bishop-builder. Even while he was alive, there were countless rumours concerning his deceitfulness and double-dealing. One of the nobles having expressed a wish to build himself a castle on one of the heights of Liège, Notker dared not oppose him openly, but secretly persuaded the Provost of Saint-Lambert to build on the coveted site the church of Sainte-Croix. It was on this occasion that the imperial bishop was accused of 'Alemannic duplicity',<sup>1</sup> and his reputation did not improve later. One legend is told about the taking of the castle of Chèvremont. Invited to assist in person at a baptism, he is said to have entered the fortress with weapons concealed under his pontifical vestments, accompanied by warriors disguised as clergy. But this ruse was no doubt attributed to Notker by the popular imagination. True or untrue, the very existence of this story proves how the imperial régime was loathed.

*ii. Formation of the Lotharingian Principalities and Expansion of Flanders*

Having become in reality imperial governors, the bishops attempted to transform Lower Lotharingia into a German province; they did not succeed. The unyielding opposition which they met from the aristocracy, backed by the whole country, forced them to make concessions, and in opposition to those episcopal principalities of Liège, Utrecht, and Cambrai, there arose lay principalities, at first weak, but later powerful,

<sup>1</sup> 'Alemannic' is here to be understood in the restricted sense of 'Suabian', Notker being a native of Suabia or Alemannia.

which, like the marquisate of Flanders, were destined to secure complete political independence. Their dynasties were almost all descended from the same stock and were related to the Carolingian family which had remained so popular in these counties. Chief amongst them was the dynasty of Régnier, whose founder had ruled the whole of Lower Lotharingia a century before. It supplied Régnier IV and Lambert I, the two princes who founded the grandeur of the houses of Mons and Louvain. The chroniclers of that period were not in sympathy with them; reflecting the opinions of that imperial Church from the schools of which they came, they attributed to these princes 'a profane mind, uncivilized habits, and a quarrelsome character'. They, however, failed to point out that these princes who were reputed to be hostile to the clergy were, in reality, hostile only to the imperial Church, and that, far from manifesting 'profane' tendencies, they strongly favoured the ecclesiastical institutions on their demesnes. The Régniers were the benefactors of the abbeys of Maubeuge, Lobbes, Sainte-Waudru, &c., while Lambert I generously endowed the chapter of Saint-Peter at Louvain. They thus pursued both temporal and spiritual aims, for, by these endowments, they bound to themselves the noble families whose younger branches profited by them.

The castles of Mons and Louvain were important strategic points, one in the diocese of Cambrai (the former land of the Nervii), the other in that of Liège (the former Tunгри). The first was long defended by counts who were devoted to the imperial cause, but Régnier IV was able to get possession of it, thanks to the support of Hugh Capet, his father-in-law. From that time he counterbalanced the influence of the counts of Valenciennes, owners of the stronghold of that name, which the emperors had built on the frontier of the Scheldt. The counts of Hainault then enlarged their territory on the



side of Brabant and extended their dominions almost as far as Brussels.

As for the castle of Louvain, it was the capital of a county of the Hesbaye, and its importance was derived from its position on the main road from Cologne to the sea, at the point where the Dyle begins to be navigable. Lambert I not only succeeded in maintaining himself there, but thanks to his marriage with Gerberga, daughter of Charles of Lorraine, he annexed also to his dominions the county of Brussels, in Brabant, of which she was the heiress. His successors still further developed their influence on the north side, towards the Campine, but were unable to acquire Antwerp, which, having been created a marquisate to defend the line of the Scheldt, was entrusted by the emperors to the House of Ardenne. Lambert I, however, victoriously resisted the representatives of the emperor, who attempted to subjugate him. He even prevented Balderic, Bishop of Liège, from constructing a fortress at Hougarde, near the frontier of the county of Louvain. He routed the episcopal troops assembled to protect its erection, but was obliged to engage in a second battle at Florennes against the bishop and his allies; the result was indecisive, but Lambert was killed (1015). This did not, however, compromise the future of his family, and Louvain remained, as before, the most important anti-imperial fortress.

Besides these powerful counties of Mons and Louvain, there were others of a smaller area, like those of Namur (whose first count was Bérenger, son-in-law of Régnier IV), Limburg, Avernas or Looz (the present Limburg), whose counts were also connected with the houses of Régnier, Luxemburg, &c. Even ordinary lordships assumed the title of county, since their rulers exercised the rights of counts; hence the confusion of titles which characterized the feudal period.

During this period ducal authority became more and more

precarious ; and even those who were invested with it revolted against the emperor and his bishops and made common cause with the territorial princes. In 1044 Duke Godfrey le Barbu, of the House of Ardenne, at first devoted to the imperial rule, broke with Henry III under pretext of having been refused the government of the whole of Lotharingia, and formed a powerful coalition with Herman of Mons and Thierry of Holland. He even obtained the adhesion of Baldwin V, Count of Flanders, who was anxious to secure the course of the Scheldt by effecting conquests on the right bank of that river. (This prince followed the same policy as his father, Baldwin IV, who had earlier obtained in fief from the emperor Valenciennes, Walcheren, and the four districts of Axel, Hulst, Assenede, and Bouchaute, but Valenciennes passed later to Hainault.) In order to subdue the feudal coalition, the emperor had recourse to the help of an Anglo-Danish fleet, and, having collected an imposing army, he appeared in person in Lotharingia, accompanied by Pope Leo IX. The rebels did not submit for two years—and then only nominally. Their forces set at defiance those of the two chiefs of western Christendom.

The Scheldt henceforth ceased to be a true frontier (as we see, it had only been so for a short time). Indeed, Baldwin V received in fief Brabant, as far as the Dendre, and, by arranging a marriage between his son Baldwin (VI) and Richilda, widow of Herman of Mons (1051), he prepared the way for a union between Flanders and Hainault. This was effected in 1067, but it was of short duration. Baldwin VI died in 1070, and the unforeseen events which followed on his death gave Flanders a more northerly tendency.

Robert the Frisian, brother of Baldwin V, who had married Gertrude, widow of Count Florent of Holland, made up his mind to tear Flanders from Richilda. He profited by the discontent that she had aroused by her despotic tendencies

and her habit of heaping favours on the members of her family, which was connected with the imperial house. The rebellion began in maritime Flanders, where barrels of pitch were hoisted on poles and set fire to, to announce it far and wide, and it very soon spread throughout the county. Richilda invoked the aid of the King of France, Philip I, but the Flemish, led by Robert, won a victory over her troops at Cassel (1071). It was one of the bloodiest battles of the period, and its memory was handed down to posterity with all manner of legendary episodes attached to it which render it impossible to ascertain the real facts. In any case, as later a chronicler of Tournai expressed it :

Ensi ot Robiers-li-Frisons  
Flandres, maugré tous les barons.  
(So got Robert the Frisian  
Flanders, in spite of all the barons.)

Richilda strove in vain to interest Theodwin, Bishop of Liège, in her cause, whom she invested with Hainault. In vain did she appeal to the Emperor Henry IV in person. She was obliged to submit to the *fait accompli*, and her second son, Baldwin (the elder, Arnulf, had been killed at Cassel), kept only Hainault.

If the ducal power had preserved some stability, the unfortunate countess would, no doubt, have had recourse to it. But Godfrey le Bossu, the prince who had it, though entirely devoted to Henry IV, was incapable of restoring the authority which his father had so contributed to weaken ; moreover, he died in 1076—the victim of a plot. He was in reality the last imperial governor in Lower Lotharingia who exercised any effective authority—feeble as that was. The bishops alone remained, for a few more years, the representatives and defenders of the emperor, more especially the bishops of Liège. Their cause was, however, irretrievably lost. It was in the

very diocese of Liège, during the first half of the tenth century, that the reforming movement of Gérard de Brogne had arisen. Founder of the monastery of that name near Namur, this knight, turned monk, paved the way for the ecclesiastical reformation afterwards propagated by the monks of Cluny, which consisted in imposing on the clergy a complete renunciation of the things of this world. What thenceforward would be the position of ecclesiastics who were at the same time territorial princes ?

The renewal of monastic life in a more austere form began first in Hainault, and spread to Flanders, Brabant, and Hesbaye, and everywhere it met with the support of the counts as well as the people. Many bishops, even, declared themselves in its favour. A crowd of new monasteries sprang up (Grammont, Saint-Amand near Bruges, Messines, Afflighem, Saint-Bernard near Antwerp, Gembloux, Waulsort, Saint-Jacques, and Saint-Laurent at Liège, &c.). From that time forward the abbeys devoted themselves more to the contemplative life and developed those mystical tendencies which made the idea of the Crusades popular in the districts of the Meuse and the Scheldt. They were considered the true pillars of the universal, as opposed to the imperial, Church, which was too much occupied with temporal interests. To them now flowed the bounty and sympathies of the faithful. The religious enthusiasm, stirred up by the monks, was especially manifested in the numerous public calamities of that time—plague, famines, and brigandage. From the end of the eleventh century dates the famous annual procession of Tournai, organized in honour of the Virgin to avert the plague from the banks of the Scheldt, to which there flocked from the Low Countries, and especially from Flanders, thousands of pilgrims who followed the miraculous statue barefooted.

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land also had a new popularity,



and Robert the Frisian undertook this perilous journey accompanied by an imposing group of knights. On his return, in 1087, he promised Alexius Comnenus, the Byzantine emperor, that he would obtain for him the aid of Flemish troops against the pagans. When Pope Urban II preached the Holy War, numerous companies were formed spontaneously among the people in the regions of the Meuse and the Scheldt to march to the conquest of Jerusalem with the certainty of finding happier conditions and, into the bargain, gaining heaven. These tumultuous crowds, led by adventurers, gave themselves up to pillage, and were, almost all, massacred before reaching Constantinople. But in 1096 the Crusade of the barons began, led by Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lotharingia, and his brother Baldwin. Godfrey of Bouillon, who, through his mother, belonged to the House of Ardenne, despite his rank of duke, exercised no real authority save in his patrimonial dominion and was able to give the emperor but little support in the Investiture Controversy. He lived retired, it seems, in his castle on the banks of the Semois, leading an ascetic life. Accordingly, he took the cross with eagerness, sold his estates to the Bishop of Liège, and mortgaged to him his castle of Bouillon. The important part which he played in the First Crusade is well known. The chivalrous qualities and conciliatory spirit which he displayed led to his election as the military head of the kingdom of Jerusalem. Robert II of Flanders also took part in this Crusade, but he did not devote himself to it as whole-heartedly as the poor Duke of Lotharingia did. He had primarily to attend to the government of his large dominions, whose power and prosperity he hoped yet further to increase; and he returned to Flanders as soon as the First Crusade had attained its goal.

Many of the Lotharingian princes seem never to have given a thought to these pious expeditions, being too fully occupied

with the task of establishing their independence and rounding off their territories. Such was Henry of Limburg, on whom Henry IV conferred the ducal dignity after the death of Godfrey of Bouillon. Of the same type also was Godfrey I of Louvain, who persuaded Henry V, in revolt against his father, to grant him that same dignity in 1106. It was then that the unhappy Henry IV found a last refuge in the episcopal city of Liège, where Otbert placed at the emperor's disposal his treasures and his warriors. The bishop's army beat back the troops of Henry V at the bridge of Visé, but the old emperor died shortly afterwards in Liège, where he was revered as a saint, despite the ban of excommunication which had been laid upon him. His dramatic death excited the pity of the people, who pictured it to themselves as accompanied by many miraculous incidents; peasants crowded about his tomb, covering it with grains of corn, with which they then sowed their fields in the hope of an abundant harvest.

This tragic episode in the dispute about Investiture marked, along with many other indications, the irremediable ruin of imperial rule in Lotharingia. The feudal tie which connected it with the empire had grown so slack that the rival houses of Limburg and Louvain soon bore the ducal title at the same time without exercising any superiority over other houses possessing the rank of counts. The emperor himself became merely a symbol, the representative of the temporal unity of western Christendom, of that 'Christian republic' which the popes of the Middle Ages sought to realize. From day to day, the individuality of the intermediate country, which stretched between the Ardennes and the North Sea, asserted itself more strongly. In one of those interesting necrologies which, in those days, circulated from abbey to abbey, and where the principal deceased dignitaries were commemorated, a clergyman of Saint-Lambert at Liège, alluding

to the situation of the country of Liège on the confines of Gaul and Germany, inscribed in the eleventh century these characteristic lines: 'We are looked upon as the last of the Gauls or as the first of the Germans. We are neither Gauls nor Germans; we belong at once to both of them.'

### *iii. Economic and Social Transmutations*

The twelfth century holds a position of the first importance in the history of Belgium; it witnessed the appearance or the development of an essential factor of Belgian nationality, namely, the towns, whose number was destined to increase at such a rate that, at the beginning of modern times, the country appeared to the Florentine historian Guicciardini as one 'continuous town'. Until the eleventh century the system of rural economy, in force since the end of the Roman period, had prevented towns from growing up. From the time of the Frankish immigration villages and rural domains ceased to exist; episcopal cities alone preserved a more or less urban character, but, in reality, they existed under the same economic system. The Carolingian renaissance had produced a slight commercial and industrial movement, which was, however, ephemeral.

At the close of the tenth and eleventh centuries a few mercantile agglomerations formed themselves here and there, in geographically favourable places such as the junctions of the routes of communication. They often attached themselves to castles or abbeys, and from these mercantile colonies came into existence the towns. In the Flemish districts these bore the characteristic name of *poort*, or trading-place—hence the word *poorters*, or citizens. Ghent was erected at the confluence of the Lys and Scheldt, near the castle of the count and between the demesnes of the abbeys of Saint-Peter and Saint-Bavon; Bruges on a stream which communicated with the Gulf of

Zwyn, near the fortress of the count ; Ypres on the Yperlee, then navigable, near the abbey of Saint-Martin. In Brabant the principal towns, such as Louvain and Brussels, had their origin, towards the close of the eleventh century, at the intersection of waterways and of the great commercial road from Bruges to Cologne, in proximity to strategic points occupied by strong fortresses. The principality of Liège was also transformed under the influence of commerce and industry. Townships developed along the extensive commercial line formed by the Meuse. Liège and Maastricht (the latter held in joint tenancy by the Bishop and the Count of Louvain) became important markets. Huy and Dinant thrived on cloth and copper industries. On the other side, Saint-Trond, Tongres, and other places in the county of Looz, which was later annexed to the episcopal principality, were also transformed into towns, thanks to their cloth trade.

The conditions of town life—the result of commerce—swept away the obstacles which arose from the old manorial régime—forced labour, rights of mortmain, and the market tolls—which affected the purchase, sale, and transport of merchandise. The *poorters* or *opidains* (inhabitants of the fortress-markets) obtained their suppression and, at the same time, acquired privileges which guaranteed the peace of the town and an autonomous administration by the institution of a special tribunal of aldermen, composed of burghers ; besides this, the territory of each town was protected by a fortified enceinte, and formed, as it were, a collective lordship for the benefit of the burghers in the midst of the vast estates ruled by the law of the manor and lordship. The privileges of the towns, however, only benefited the greater *bourgeoisie*, that is the mercantile aristocracy, which imposed its will on the artisans who were settled within the jurisdiction of the town. These were, so to speak, only half-burghers, although in reality



they were reckoned a part of the *bourgeoisie*. They did not possess political rights: grouped in crafts, they were obliged to work for the town, or the patricians who governed it. They were subject to the regulations of the magistracy, which organized labour as it liked. The artisans of industries producing goods for export were those who were most closely dependent on the mercantile aristocracy. The power of the latter lay chiefly in its grouping into associations. Each town constituted a little world in itself, where the merchants, associated in guilds, gave the tone and arranged everything to their own advantage: themselves procuring the raw materials, they fixed wages and disposed of the manufactured goods. They possessed commercial monopolies from which they mercilessly excluded the artisans, and they alone had the right of electing the members of the magistracy, which by its combination of judicial and administrative functions exercised very great power and sacrificed to the upper the interests of the lower classes. It will be seen that this epoch of the Middle Ages was not—as was long believed to be the case—the golden age of the town artisan. It was not until the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century that democratic movements produced the full development of corporate life and transformed the crafts into more or less self-governing groups.

In economics and politics, the part played by the towns has been, since the twelfth century, very evident and at times very decisive. This has not been the case in the intellectual sphere. There the abbeys and churches continued to play the foremost part and to spread abroad the influence of France, the chief centre of mediaeval civilization. Like the Cluniacs of the preceding century, the Cistercians introduced into their monasteries the language and ideas of their native country. The Templars and Hospitallers also contributed to extend throughout Europe the influence of France. They developed

the vogue of chivalry. The courts of the different territorial princes, especially that of the counts of Flanders, were modelled on that of the kings of France. Philip of Alsace, the feudal Maecenas, entertained Christian of Troyes, the greatest French poet of that period, and his wife is celebrated for her decisions in the courts of love. The first literary works in Dutch are mostly mere translations of 'romances'. It was in this way that Hendrik van Veldeke, knight of the county of Looz, made accessible to the Dutch-speaking public the *Aeneas* of Benedict de Sainte-More. However, in contrast to the feudal epic, there appeared at this time the animal epic, which was essentially bourgeois. As early as the eleventh century there circulated among the urban population stories of animals of Oriental, Greek, or German origin. They supplied the elements of the masterpiece amongst the animal epics of the Middle Ages—the *Reinaert* of Willem, full of a spirit of raillery and satire directed at the nobles and clergy.

Artistic activity was still confined to ecclesiastical architecture, especially to monasteries and cathedrals. The cathedral of Tournai still bears witness, by its massive grandeur, to the austerity and mysticism of the period; but it exhibits certain reliefs, capitals, and portals, where the search for plastic form is already revealed. It combines motives inspired by the great Norman churches with others borrowed from the churches on the banks of the Rhine. Tournai, the religious capital of Flanders, was at the same time its artistic capital during this period, and its sculptors and architects were the forerunners of the Flemish artists. During this epoch the school of the Meuse accentuated its originality and distinguished itself more and more from its neighbour, the Rhenish school, with which it has so often been confounded. The sculptors of the Meuse district abandoned the conventional types of ecclesiastical art and drew nearer to nature. The fonts of Saint-Bartholomew,

at Liège, mark a date in the history of plastic art. This art of the twelfth century expresses by its symbols the religious doctrines of the period, which were no longer confined to books. Stones once more became eloquent; they were transformed into nude figures decorating the lintels of doorways or the capitals of pillars, &c., representing scenes from religious history and sacred legends. On the other hand, the art of the enameller and the goldsmith continued to enhance the glory of religion; they shone resplendent in the marvellous shrines which were hardly excelled in after days.

In short, up to this time, art only lent itself to evoke mystic thoughts. Aesthetic preoccupations were unknown to the constructors of the civil monuments of this period. A practical and utilitarian spirit dominated feudal dwellings, as for example the castle of the counts at Ghent, whose haughty aspect seems to us to-day one of the most significant memorials of that epoch which witnessed the apogee of the Flemish 'monarchy'.

*iv. Political zenith of Flanders. Conflict between Brabant and the Country of Liège*

It was not all at once that the towns dominated political evolution. The process was gradual and began in the principalities most favoured by the economic revival. Flanders was destined to feel its effects before any of the others; maritime ports, industrial centres and centres of river traffic, grain markets, all multiplied themselves there, thanks chiefly to its favourable geographical situation. This nursery of towns enabled the counts of Flanders to develop an enormous power, which served to consolidate the independence of the country and to extend its sphere of influence. But the towns themselves led the policy of the counts into new paths. Thanks to commerce and industry, they had the disposal of sources of wealth more abundant than those of the holders of rural demesnes, and

they victoriously defended their interests against the old social powers, lords and prelates. They directed Flanders towards an alliance with England, because that country furnished the raw material for their main industry and constituted one of their chief markets. They intervened in dynastic affairs, and, after the assassination of Charles the Good, who left no heirs (1127), they succeeded in removing from the throne of Flanders William of Normandy, an anti-English prince, forced upon them by the King of France. This prince made them the most splendid promises, such as a reduction of market tolls and of the land tax; but he did not keep them, and in governing the country relied solely upon the landed nobility. The towns formed into a coalition to overthrow him. Ghent and Bruges opened their gates to Thierry of Alsace; King Louis VI immediately sent assistance to William, but it was useless. William was killed in the siege of Alost, and the king at once resigned himself to the investiture of the protégé of the Flemish towns.

The House of Alsace found in the towns of this county powerful auxiliaries for its policy of expansion. It drew into the sphere of Flemish influence most of the Lotharingian principalities, which were thus still further separated from the empire. What was more, it tended to exercise a regular leadership in France. Count Philip of Alsace became the tutor and chief adviser of Philip Augustus, and it seemed as if Flanders would absorb the kingdom of France, whose unity was, at that time, far from being achieved. However, the violent and passionate policy of the count miscarried before the cunning and the deliberate tenacity of the king. The conflict which broke out between them abounds in dramatic episodes. Philip Augustus at first pretended to desire a close alliance with his old adviser; he married his niece, Elizabeth of Hainault, who brought him as her dower the rich province of Artois.



Philip of Alsace discovered too late that he had been taken in by the young king. He hurriedly organized a vast league against him, which he persuaded Henry I, Duke of Louvain, his brother-in-law the Count of Hainault (Baldwin V), and the Count of Namur to join, and sought to win to his side the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa, urging him to intervene 'in order to extend the boundaries of the empire as far as the "British Sea"'. But Baldwin V of Hainault abandoned Philip; he made himself the intermediary between the King of France and Frederic Barbarossa, and thus became chief of the Franco-Ghibelline party in the Low Countries—which won him among other things the succession of the county of Namur.

Philip of Alsace vainly strove to recover the frontier of the Somme; betrayed by Jacques d'Avesnes and obliged to confront enemies superior in numbers, he sued for peace. Vermandois and the important town of Amiens, which had belonged to him through his wife, Elizabeth of Vermandois, finally passed out of his possession. Then, forgetting his mortification, he pursued other dreams of greatness. Once more he journeyed to the Holy Land. He had already visited it in 1177, and he had quarrelled with the King of Jerusalem and the barons of Syria, whom he had offended by his arrogance. He took part now, like Philip Augustus and Richard I, in the Crusade which followed the fall of Jerusalem, and died at the siege of Acre (1191).

Baldwin V took possession of Flanders. It was thus, for the second time, united to Hainault, which had lost almost the whole of Artois, Boulonnais, and other territories. There he assumed the name of Baldwin VIII. His position in Flanders was extremely difficult; the hostility which he had shown to Philip of Alsace was not calculated to win for him the sympathy of the Flemings, and, moreover, Philip Augustus, far from being grateful to him, sought only to undermine his power. When his

wife, Marguerite of Alsace, died (1194), he retired to Hainault and left the government of Flanders to his son, Baldwin IX. He died the following year, and Baldwin IX recovered the paternal inheritance, with the exception of the district of Namur, which became the apanage of his brother Philip.

The new count followed, from the outset, a policy which was essentially inspired by the interests of the large Flemish towns. Its keystone was: riendship with England, which was linked with Flanders by so many economic ties, and he concluded with King Richard a treaty stipulating that neither party should make a separate peace with Philip Augustus. Baldwin IX attacked the districts of Cambrai and Tournai and laid siege to Arras.

The King of France wished to invade Flanders, but his advisers dissuaded him. 'Such an enterprise', they told him, 'could never succeed, owing to the multitude of dikes and the lack of roads.' He nevertheless advanced as far as Ypres, but soon found himself reduced to such straits that he was obliged to throw himself on the generosity of the count. Baldwin IX made the mistake of trusting the word of the king, who, once out of his difficulties, forgot all his promises. Baldwin contented himself with a couple of towns (Aire and Saint-Omer) and, obsessed by ambitious projects, set out in 1202 on the Crusade which ended in the conquest of Constantinople. This enterprise proved fatal alike to him and to his states. Raised to the throne of the ancient Byzantine empire, he was taken prisoner near Adrianople by the Bulgarians, and put to death by them shortly afterwards.

He had left behind him in Flanders his two daughters, one still in the cradle, and had entrusted them to the care of his brother Philip, Count of Namur. Philip's one idea was to further his own interests by favouring those of the King of France. Jeanne, the elder of the two princesses, married

in 1212 Ferrand of Portugal, who, being a complete stranger to Flanders, was simply a tool in the hands of Philip Augustus. The latter believed that he had prepared the way for the definitive subjection of Flanders and Hainault to the French crown.

The vicissitudes of Flanders singularly favoured the development of Brabant (the former county of Louvain), which was destined, during the following century, to take so high a place. The dukes of Brabant adroitly used for their own ends the conflicts which broke out around them. They simply played off against each other the Anglo-Guelph and the Franco-Ghibelline parties who were contending for the superiority in those countries. Such was the policy of Henry I, whose long reign (1190-1235) marks a decisive epoch in the annals of Brabant. He had proved his military skill while leading the army of crusaders, in 1197, against the emir, Saphadin, brother of Saladin, over whom he gained a famous victory. But, in the following year, he returned to his states, which, during his absence, had been governed by his wife, Matilda of Boulogne.

Henry was at first a bitter enemy of the Capetians and the Hohenstaufen (Franco-Ghibellines), but effected a reconciliation with Philip Augustus and Philip of Suabia as soon as he saw their success. Thanks to this reconciliation, he obtained from Philip of Suabia the definite surrender of the rights of the empire over Nivelles and Maastricht, besides other favours. But as soon as he was able to reap greater profits by returning to the Anglo-Guelph party, he once more changed sides.

During the interval he repeatedly interfered in the principality of Liège. One of the chief bones of contention was Maastricht, a town of great commercial importance. Bishop Hugh of Pierrepont having destroyed the fortifications built there by the duke's orders, the latter surprised the city of Liège, gave it up to pillage, and took possession of the

episcopal palace himself, piercing the air with his sword north, south, east, and west. But he soon returned to Brabant, and when he undertook a new raid into the episcopal principality he was strenuously opposed by the town of Liège, whose militia won a decisive victory over him at Steppes, near Montekenaken (1213). This battle of Steppes, in which the knighthood of Brabant collapsed under the lance-thrusts of the infantry of Liège, Huy, and Fosses, secured the independence of the country of Liège for centuries.

The position of Brabant then became extremely critical. It was invaded at one and the same time by the militia of Liège and the troops of Ferrand of Portugal. The latter penetrated to the gates of Brussels, and Henry I was obliged to humble himself before Hugh of Pierrepont, Bishop of Liège, to appear as a suppliant in the cathedral of Saint-Lambert and, on his knees, to implore to be released from excommunication. At the very moment when he was giving the kiss of peace, he was planning another return to the Anglo-Guelph camp, which the Count of Flanders had long since joined.

In fact, Ferrand of Portugal, ever since his accession (1212), had intended to free himself from the tutelage of Philip Augustus. Realizing the necessity of the alliance with England to Flemish towns—essential factors in the prosperity of the country—he became reconciled with John (Lackland) and with the Guelph party in Germany, which supported Otto IV. But this coalition, to which Henry I eventually adhered, broke down tragically on the battle-field of Bouvines (1214). The unfortunate Ferrand was taken prisoner. He remained in captivity at the Louvre until the death of Louis VIII (1226).

Countess Jeanne was forced to consent to the humiliating treaty of Melun, which the Flemish towns stigmatized as the 'pact of iniquity': it deprived Flanders of the right to



construct new fortresses and even to repair the old without royal authorization ; moreover, the knights and the towns of the county were compelled to pledge themselves to respect these clauses, under pain of excommunication. The future of Flanders was seriously compromised, but as the towns of Liège had saved the existence of the episcopal principality, so the Flemish towns were to save that of the county of Flanders.

## *Rise of the Cities (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries)*

### *i. Crisis in Flanders*

THE thirteenth and fourteenth centuries stand out as an epoch of extraordinary vitality for all the Belgian principalities, but the pre-eminence of Flanders was maintained. From the economic point of view, it outstripped the rest as a result of the number, the populations, and the wealth of its towns. The old urban centres had developed these with astonishing rapidity: Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres exceeded 50,000 inhabitants, a very considerable figure for that period. The trade of Bruges was extended owing to the steadily increasing relations between the north and south of Europe on the one hand, between Germany and England on the other. It became a really European market. The Italian towns took an active share in its maritime trade, which was still further developed by the creation of the port of Damme, at the end of the twelfth century. Along the Zwyn there sprang into existence a multitude of new towns, such as Termuiden and Sluys, which also profited from international commerce. The wines of France and the wools of England lay side by side on the quays of Bruges, together with merchandise from the Mediterranean (spices, dye-woods, products of oriental industry) and from the countries of the Baltic (wood for building purposes, dried fish, timber, metals). The centre of gravity of Flanders remained fixed in the north, especially after the emigration of the bankers of Arras, who settled there after the loss of Artois. Bruges thus became the greatest banking town and the greatest harbour

of Europe. The Hanse of Bruges, the merchants of which imported wool from England, collected round it those of most of the other towns and then called itself the Hanse of London, which existed until the moment when Bruges itself became the great mart of English wool on the Continent, that is till the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Ghent and Ypres were, with Douai and Lille, the chief centres of the cloth industry. Their cloth acquired a European reputation on account of its flexibility and fineness, as well as for its gorgeous colouring; it even found its way to the East. Round these centres were grouped a regular series of new towns, whose expansion was, however, to some extent hindered by the jealousy of the older cities.

The extraordinary development of the Flemish towns differentiated Flanders more and more from the majority of the provinces under the direct sway of the crown of France, where agriculture predominated. The economic and social contrast which it presented to the other districts drew it outside their sphere, despite the strong political attraction which was exercised by the French monarchy. This attraction extended to all the old Lotharingian provinces and constitutes one of the main facts of the latter part of the Middle Ages. It manifested itself with astonishing force during the reign of Saint Louis, at the time of the famous feudal quarrel between the Avesnes and the Dampierres.

This prolonged conflict began on the accession (1244) of Countess Marguerite, second daughter of Baldwin IX of Constantinople. This princess had at first been married to Bouchard d'Avesnes, a knight of Hainault, by whom she had two sons, John and Baldwin. Bouchard having quarrelled with his sister-in-law, Countess Jeanne, Marguerite retired with him to the castle of Houffalize in the heart of the Ardennes, and lived for six years amid this wild solitude.

Accused of having been ordained subdeacon in his youth, Bouchard went to Rome, to vindicate the validity of his marriage; but Marguerite became reconciled with her sister and, without waiting to hear the pontifical decision, contracted a new marriage with William de Dampierre, a cadet of the House of Champagne, by whom she had several children. She wished to reserve the whole of her inheritance for the eldest of these children when, after the death of her two husbands, she succeeded her sister as Countess of Flanders and Hainault.

The two sons of her first marriage vigorously laid claim to their rights, supported by the Emperor Frederic II, who recognized their legitimacy. To avoid a war, the parties had recourse to the arbitration of the papal legate, Eudes of Châteauroux, and of the King of France. The decision of the arbiters awarded Flanders to the Dampierres and Hainault to the Avesnes (1246). It favoured the former by assigning to them by far the larger and wealthier portion, and it included therein the imperial fiefs without consulting their suzerain. Jean d'Avesnes obtained the investiture of these lands, when Marguerite had conferred the title of Count of Flanders upon Guy de Dampierre. War broke out while Saint Louis was in the Holy Land; it was disastrous for the countess, whose troops suffered a serious reverse at Westcapelle, in the island of Walcheren. This was one of the reasons which induced the King of France to return from Palestine. At Marguerite's request, he detached some of its dependencies from Hainault for the benefit of Flanders, with the result that the hatred between the rival families was still further increased. The quarrel had not, however, that degree of importance which was so long attached to it. It hardly influenced the relations of the peoples of Flanders and Hainault, and it did not lead either to a national conflict or to civil wars, as was so long believed.

The ascendancy of the French monarchy enabled Guy de



Dampierre (1278-1305) to brave with impunity the majesty of the emperor. His rival, John II of Avesnes, in vain drew the attention of Rudolf of Habsburg to the increasing insolence of Gaul. The Count of Flanders scoffed at 'the blunted sword of the empire', and acted just as he liked beyond the Scheldt. He acquired the district of Namur, extended his influence in the county of Liège, in Luxemburg, and in Guelders, and thus became the most powerful prince in the Low Countries.

He owed, however, the greater part of these results to the support of the King of France, and after some time the protection which the latter had accorded him tended to become a protectorate. Philip the Fair turned to account the quarrels between Guy and the magistrates of the towns, using them to undermine the authority of the former. The humiliations and wrongs to which the count was subjected were such that, when war broke out between his suzerain and Edward I of England, he at first gave secret support to the latter (1294), and later consented to the marriage of his daughter Philippine with the heir of the English king. On hearing of this proposed alliance, Philip the Fair summoned the count before the Parliament of Paris, and consigned him to its disposal until the child had been brought to the Louvre.

Royal governors were installed in the chief towns of Flanders, and Philip seized Valenciennes, the inhabitants of which, through hatred of the Avesnes, had handed themselves over to Guy de Dampierre. In his wrath, the old count concluded, in 1297, an offensive and defensive alliance with Edward. But before the troops of the allies had time to assemble, a royal army entered Flanders and penetrated almost to Ypres, while the municipal council of Bruges sent the keys of their town to Philip. The exhaustion of his treasury compelled the king to conclude a three years' truce, at the conclusion of which he took possession of the rest of Flanders in a few months.

Count Guy and his son, Robert of Béthune, threw themselves on his mercy. The *fleurs-de-lys* replaced the *lion sable* on the Flemish banners and the erection of several royal castles was begun. The county of Flanders ceased to exist (1300).

If Flanders yielded to the attraction of France from the political point of view, it drew farther away from it in its social evolution, which was characterized by the increasing preponderance of the urban element. The progress of the bourgeois, or communal, spirit—all the members of a commune were at that period qualified as burghers—was nowhere more clearly revealed than in literary history. It was at that time that the outstanding figure of Maerlant appeared (second half of the thirteenth century). Risen, no doubt, from the ranks of those sheriffs' clerks or town secretaries who devoted their leisure hours to study, he formally abandoned the literature of courtesy and the translations of French romances in order to popularize didactic works. He drew his knowledge from books written in Latin, and made them accessible to his compatriots by translating them into the tongue they spoke. He handled the most varied subjects: natural history, politics and morals, sacred history (*Rijmbijbel*), and profane history (*Spiegel historiael*). His works acquired such popularity that several of them were translated into French. Very justly was he named later the 'father of all the Flemish poets'.

The urban spirit was not only manifested by literary productions; it also inspired new artistic conceptions. It created those imposing halls and splendid belfries which attest so well the persistent labour of the Flemish *bourgeoisie* and symbolize at the same time the ideal of independence which they pursued with so much energy. The halls of Bruges and Ypres are models of that specially urban form of architecture which was later developed so rapidly and vigorously throughout the Low Countries.

*ii. Emancipation of the Country of Liège*

During the crisis through which Flanders passed in the days of Saint Louis, the old Lotharingian principalities threw off practically, not legally, the yoke of the empire and in general became consolidated, despite long, bloody, and ever-recurring feudal wars. The country of Liège itself, which had formed the centre of the ancient Lotharingia, and which the Saxon kings had hoped to convert into one of the outposts of the empire, escaped from the imperial authority. One of the chief results of the Investiture Controversy was a radical alteration in the method of appointing bishops. The latter were no longer nominated by the emperor, but by the chapters of the cathedrals. At Liège, the chapter of Saint-Lambert repeatedly chose prelates of French origin, such as Hugh of Pierrepont (1200-29), John of Eppes (1229-38), and Robert of Thorote (1240-6). But later on it was obliged to pay more and more attention to the recommendations of the papacy, and the share of the chapter was frequently limited to registering the decisions of the supreme pontiff or his representatives. In either case imperial influence was definitely eliminated.

The spirit of independence was further intensified when the towns of Liège played an active part in the government of the principality. In opposition to the prince-bishops, who were constantly absorbed in dynastic quarrels, they pursued a policy which was essentially based on their own interests, and in particular on their commercial interests, and for this purpose they formed coalitions with each other. Their first league was constituted immediately after the death of Hugh of Pierrepont (1229). John of Eppes, nephew and successor of that bishop, in vain obtained first the condemnation of this league by Henry VII, King of the Romans, and later the prohibition by the Diet of Worms of all coalitions and leagues of cities

within the empire ; his efforts proved fruitless. This league, which was several times dissolved, was always re-formed, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly. It united for a common purpose the Walloon towns of Liège, Huy, and Dinant, as well as the Flemish towns of Saint-Trond, Maastricht, and Tongres, and it tended to form the preponderating element in what came to be described as 'the opinion of the country',<sup>1</sup> the earlier equivalent of the 'States', created later in the other principalities.

In point of fact the principality of Liège was fast developing into a republic. It even secured temporary recognition of its status from the imperial power itself. This occurred when, in 1230, Henry VII, during his conflict with the pope, on whose side the bishop had declared himself, withdrew the prohibition which had been pronounced the year before against leagues between towns and solemnly confirmed the privileges of the city of Liège. But Henry VII followed the same policy in the case of Liège as in the case of Verdun some years before. As soon as he was reconciled with the pope he withdrew the diplomas which he had previously granted, sheltering himself behind the decision of the Diet of Worms.

The opposition of the towns to the prince only grew stronger, and it reached the height of violence during the reign of Henry of Guelders (1247-74). This great feudal lord was forced upon the chapter by Innocent IV, in order to strengthen the party of Henry's cousin, William of Holland, whom the same pope had raised to the dignity of King of the Romans. Quarrelsome and arbitrary in his conduct, he defied from the outset these towns, which were already conscious of their power. Far from inducing them to forget the part which his father had taken in the ranks of their enemies at the battle of Steppes, he never ceased to exact money from them in order to meet

<sup>1</sup> 'Le sens du pays.'



the expenses of his military enterprises. He seems even to have dreamed of restoring the imperial régime, under a different form, and of re-establishing the supremacy of the principality of Liège over the other Lotharingian principalities.

It was with this end in view that he interfered, amongst others, in the quarrel between the Avesnes and the Dampierres. At the moment when Hainault was invaded by the troops of the latter, he proclaimed a state of war, but the militias of Liège absolutely refused to take arms (1253). The head of the opposition was Henry of Dinant, who contended that the city owed military service for home defence only and not for foreign war. The prince placed the city under an interdict, caused an imperial edict to be promulgated against it, and, further, erected the castle of Sainte-Walburge to hold it in check. He outlawed Henry of Dinant and, with the help of an imposing military force, recruited from the smaller feudal nobility, contrived to subdue the rebellious towns. In 1269, however, the castle of Sainte-Walburge was surprised by the burghers of Liège, who offered the protectorate of the principality to John I, Duke of Brabant, under the title of patron.

It was only through the mediation of Marguerite of Flanders that they were reconciled with the prince. This reconciliation was only superficial. There is not the slightest doubt that the burghers of Liège contributed to secure the deposition of Henry of Guelders in 1274, by the Council of Lyons. The pope at that time happened to be Gregory X; a former canon of Saint-Lambert. He had been in a position to appreciate the disqualifications of Henry of Guelders for the episcopal office; Henry had been guilty of embezzling the public funds, of selling ecclesiastical property, of debauchery, and of every kind of excess. His successors abandoned his ambitious plans and made no further attempt to revive the former supremacy of the

bishopric of Liège in Lotharingia. Moreover, the support which the prince-bishops had hitherto obtained from the lesser nobility of Hesbaye now failed them, owing to the many private wars which wasted the district for nearly fifty years. The longest of these, that between the Awans and the Waroux, made its effect felt in the chief cities of the district of Liège, to the patrician families of which the members of the two parties were related.

Then took place the fall of that warlike little aristocracy of whom Jacques de Hemricourt, secretary to the municipal council of Liège, in the following century, related the prowess in recording its genealogies in his *Miroir des Nobles de Hesbaye*; it dragged down with it a section of the urban aristocracy, thus giving the democratic movement an irresistible energy. The democratic movement accentuated still more strongly the independent tendencies of the towns, and the principality of Liège was the first district in the Low Countries to secure any real territorial constitution.

The peace of Fexhe (1316) definitely consecrated the division of government between the prince and the people. The prince undertook to 'treat every one according to law and justice' and to consult the *sens du pays*, that is the chapter of Saint-Lambert, the nobles, and the towns, with regard to any change to be effected in the customary law of the district. Law was thus guaranteed against princely despotism.

### iii. Rise of Brabant

The extraordinary height to which Brabant rose in the thirteenth century has often been attributed to the continuity of its dynasty. This fact certainly assisted, up to a certain point, but there are other facts whose influence was much more decisive. Moreover, it must not be forgotten

that certain changes of reign involved disturbances and difficulties : thus, on the death of Henry III, the regency of Alix of Burgundy was marked by grave unrest, which compromised the unity of the duchy. The dowager duchess wished her second son John to be recognized as heir, instead of the elder, Henry, who, she pretended, was unfit to reign. A large part of the aristocracy rose in arms, and Louvain closed its gates. Henry of Guelders, Bishop of Liège, profited by this conflict to make several ' expeditions ' on the territory of Brabant. It was not until seven years later that the duchess was able to restore order, and to secure the throne to the son for whom she had designed it.

The co-operation between the towns and the old aristocracy seems to have contributed, more than all else, to the political progress of Brabant, and the ducal power knew how to strengthen this co-operation and to increase its unity. The dukes skilfully turned to account the military and economic resources of their towns, especially those of Louvain, Brussels, and Antwerp, and under the semblance of a feudal policy they pursued ends which were essentially bourgeois, in the original sense of that word—that is, urban. They renounced their former pretensions to imperial Flanders in order to devote themselves to the extension and strengthening of their influence towards the east, and to secure that commercial road from the Rhine to the sea, on which the economic prosperity of Brabant depended.

Henry I had already inaugurated this policy : at Maastricht, which commanded this road, he had consistently restricted the authority of the Bishop of Liège ; he had recruited new subjects among its inhabitants by allowing them to join the *familia* of Saint Peter of Louvain, of which he was special protector and from which the patrician lineage of that town originated. Moreover, he constructed on the right bank of the Meuse the Tower of Wijk, in order to guard the bridge of

Maastricht. Henry II and Henry III were inspired by his example. Henry II seized, among other places, the castle of Dalhem, which served him as an outpost on the right of the Meuse, at the expense of the Archbishop of Cologne. Henry III obtained from Alphonse of Castile, King of the Romans, the title of guardian of the vassals and towns of the empire between Brabant and the Rhine.

But it was John I (1261-94) who continued this policy with most energy and success. He profited, it is true, from the decline of the empire and from the difficulties in which his neighbours the Avesnes and the Dampierres were involved owing to their quarrel over Flanders and its dependencies, and the prince-bishops of Liège, owing to their struggle with internal disturbances. Although he kept on excellent terms with the court of France (his sister Mary married Philip III), he did not allow himself to be dominated by the French monarchs, who aspired to extend their influence as far as the Rhine. Nor did he allow himself to be carried away by the pontifical propaganda in support of new crusades. At the time of his sister's coronation in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (1275), he took the cross like the rest of those who were present, but he made no reply to the prayers of Gregory X, who had believed that he saw the realization of the political and spiritual union of Western Christendom. The days of an Urban II and of an Innocent III were over. To hunt down robbers and to destroy the castles of rural nobles who gave themselves up to brigandage and levied contributions on merchants, were held in those days to be deeds as meritorious as the deliverance of the holy places.

John I devoted himself to this task. He constituted himself surety for peace between the Meuse and the Rhine. For this purpose he formed a great league with his neighbours on the east, in order to assure the safety of travellers and merchants



and to pursue brigands and coiners of base money. He also came to an agreement with the towns of Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne. Moreover, he established his protectorate over the country of Liège by accepting the position of patron offered to him by that city. He also succeeded in neutralizing the town of Maastricht and in striking there a common coinage for Brabant and the country of Liège.

Finally, a feudal quarrel furnished him with the excuse to satisfy alike his warlike tastes and the economic needs of his 'good' towns. He purchased from Adolf of Berg the succession of Limburg, which was disputed by several claimants in 1283. He was obliged to face a formidable coalition, a notable member of which was the Archbishop of Cologne. He was able, however, to prevent John of Flanders, Bishop of Liège, from adhering to it by concluding a treaty of friendship with the burghers of his capital. Moreover, he created difficulties for the archbishop, and even stirred up rebellion among his burghers, thus securing an excuse for intervention. In 1288 he led his army of knights and town militia, reinforced by contingents from Liège and elsewhere, to the banks of the Rhine in order to besiege the castle of Worringen, where a toll, hateful to the merchants of Cologne, was levied. Despite their disparity in numbers, the squadrons of Brabant, well disciplined and in order, broke the ranks of the enemy, who lacked cohesion and mobility. The battle of Worringen created a great impression. It marked the decisive preponderance of the Duke of Brabant between the Rhine and the Scheldt, where the predecessors of the Archbishop of Cologne had exercised so considerable an influence. The annexation of Limburg to the duchy of Brabant meant that henceforward there was only one Duke of Lotharingia.

Jan van Heelu, member of a military order, celebrated his exploits in a chronicle written in verse for the benefit of

Margaret of York, the English princess who married John II, eldest son of the victor of Worringen. John I was able to maintain an independent attitude towards the kings of France, whose aggressive policy frequently interfered, as has been seen, beyond the Scheldt. He, however, favoured French culture, and welcomed to his court the *trouvère*, Adenet le Roi ; but in this he only displayed his liking for chivalrous customs, and for the literature of the country which was at that period the principal home of civilization.

Brabant long preserved the semi-feudal, semi-urban character which distinguished it at that time, and in the next century, when it followed the example of the principality of Liège by giving itself in its turn a territorial constitution under the name of the 'Joyous Entry', this dual character became clearly evident.

The successors of John I (John II and John III) were often obliged to have recourse to the towns and to the nobles in order to provide for their ever-growing financial needs. They only obtained the 'aids' they asked by constantly granting larger privileges, permitting them to control the expenditure of the aids and even to take a share in the general affairs of the duchy. After the extinction of the male line of the House of Brabant (1355), the towns took the initiative in demanding guarantees from Jane, daughter of John III, and from her husband, Wenceslas of Luxemburg. In agreement with the nobles, they exacted in return for their recognition of these princes the act of the 'Joyous Entry' (1356): the princes undertook to maintain the indivisibility of Brabant, to appoint only Brabançons to the offices of the duchy, to conclude no alliance, to undertake no war, and to coin no money without the consent of the three orders, the clergy, the nobility, and the towns (later known by the name of States). As in the country of Liège, princely power was thus limited by a con-

stitutional charter sanctioning the right of the privileged orders, and more especially of the burghers, to take part in the government of the principality. But on their side, these orders swore fealty and obedience to the prince, who remained the ultimate sovereign lord, the seigneur. His authority was, so to speak, sanctified ; it rested on the prestige of a long tradition, and, curiously enough, this prestige was maintained by the urban writers themselves. One of them, Jan Boendale (died 1365), has celebrated the *Gestes* of the dukes of Brabant (*Brabantsche Yeesten*), comparing them to those of Charlemagne, whom he converted into the predecessor of the Brabançon princes. His work shows intense dynastic feeling and unshaken loyalty ; in it, among other phrases, occurs the significant statement that the Duke of Brabant ' has no superior lord, save God '.

#### *iv. The Democratic Movement*

The marvellous prosperity which distinguished the Belgian towns in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, evidence of which still remains in their splendid array of monuments, was essentially the result of the rapid development of the great industries, that is industries devoted to the production of commodities for export. They chiefly consisted of cloth manufacture, as will be remembered. There, more than anywhere else in the West, and earlier there than elsewhere, the difficulties inseparable from all great industries were bound to arise : conflicts between employers and employees, principally on the question of wages.

At the outset each town constituted an economic unit, a little world in itself, ruled by the merchants or by their descendants, who formed an exclusive aristocracy or patriciate, a regular caste. It was this aristocratic caste which held all communal offices and which regulated the whole life of the city ;

but it paid much more attention to its own interests than those of the commune. The patricians transformed the shrievalty into a kind of hereditary fief : everywhere the sheriffs formed a regular clique and generally retained their offices for life ; among them were old men, invalids and lepers, totally incapable of fulfilling their duties. They arbitrarily fixed the scale of wages and, in order to prevent the emancipation of artisans, they steadfastly refused them the right of association. Artisans engaged in the cloth industry, in particular, were kept in tutelage ; they only formed trades (*ambachten*), economic groups, 'for the service' of the town. If the artisans of industries working for local commerce, such as bakers, butchers, blacksmiths, &c., occasionally succeeded in forming clubs for mutual assistance, they did so only under the supervision of the communal authorities, and in no case were they able to establish real associations such as those of the merchants, which were known as *hansas*, or gilds.

The contrast between the two classes of the urban population is revealed by all kinds of obvious indications : the dwellings of the patricians were *steenene*, or houses of stone, the battlements of which proudly overlooked the thatched huts of the workmen, which were often relegated to the suburbs. The communal army was practically composed of the patricians, who served on horseback ; many of them were even admitted to the order of knighthood, and all of them claimed the title of sire (*here*).

From the middle of the thirteenth century the towns of Flanders and Liège were disturbed by revolts of the 'commons' ; the 'little people' found many sympathizers among the priests and the mendicant friars (Dominicans and Franciscans), who, while preaching the doctrine of Christian humility, unintentionally spread scorn and hatred of the rich. On several occasions the superiors of Franciscan or Dominican



convents were selected to arbitrate in disputes between rich and poor.

Moreover, the patrician régime became so exclusive and so narrow that even part of the urban aristocracy broke away from those who monopolized the direction of affairs and made common cause with the people. Complaints daily multiplied concerning the faulty administration of the directing body; they were accused of arbitrarily increasing the taxes, of wasting the public funds, and even of embezzling them for their own benefit. In 1253 Henry of Dinant, one of the masters of the city of Liège, in provoking a rising against the prince, overthrew by the same stroke the patrician clique. But, after his banishment, an aristocratic reaction took place simultaneously with the re-establishment of princely authority. In many of the towns, however, the sheriffs often came into collision with the power of the prince owing to their autonomist tendencies. When, in 1280, a democratic revolution broke out in Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, and Douai, Guy of Dampierre made use of it to overthrow the oligarchy of the patricians. He abolished almost everywhere the hereditary shrievalties, and allowed the workmen of the trades representation in the town councils. The oligarchical party in the Flemish towns found a powerful ally in the King of France, Philip the Fair; sheltering themselves behind the *fleurs-de-lys*, the emblem of French suzerainty, they braved the authority of the counts. The democrats henceforth called them *Leliaerts* (people of the *lys*), while they themselves took the name of *Clauwaerts* (people of the claw, that is, the claw of the lion of Flanders), and supported the count in the long conflict which broke out between him and King Philip the Fair. They found allies among the peasants of the maritime district. But Guy of Dampierre had no faith in the future of the democracies, and preferred to give himself into the custody of the King of France rather

than to attempt a struggle which he believed to be doomed to failure.

The régime established in Flanders by Philip the Fair in 1300 strengthened there the abuses of the oligarchy of the wealthier classes and the petty rural nobility. He entrusted the government of the country to a member of the latter, Jacques of Châtillon, a man of haughty and violent character. His administration only favoured the feudal lords and the 'grandeens' of the towns; completely ignoring the interests of the artisans and even of the merchants, it imposed on them exorbitant taxes and all kinds of exactions. It was not long, however, before a violent reaction manifested itself. At Bruges, the expenses occasioned by the fêtes in honour of the king's visit had necessitated the levy of a tax which caused great discontent among the men of the trades, and more especially among those engaged in the great industry, weavers, fullers, clothworkers, &c. One weaver, Peter de Coninc, a small man of mean appearance but endowed with overpowering eloquence, and with a capacity for organization of the first order, gave the rising of the 'commons' the necessary unity and cohesion.

In the month of June 1301 a violent riot broke out at Bruges. The artisans armed themselves, and captured the count's *steen*, in which the richer classes and the knights had taken refuge. It was only owing to the support of the French garrison of Courtrai that Châtillon was able to subdue the rebels. The town of Bruges was then deprived of its privileges, its ramparts were destroyed, while the governor laid the foundations of a solid fortress intended to prevent any new revolt. But even before this was completed, de Coninc, who had fled to Zealand with a great number of his companions, came to an understanding with some members of the family of the count (John and Guy of Namur, his sons, and

William of Juliers, his nephew) in order to overthrow the common enemies both of the prince and of the 'little people'. His return to Bruges resulted in the flight of Châtillon and a crowd of his partisans, while the destruction of the ramparts and the construction of the royal fortress were interrupted. In other towns the democrats also rose in rebellion, but Châtillon soon returned with an imposing force. On May 17, 1302, he entered Bruges with a threatening array of troops. The people, far from being terrorized, plotted the massacre of those who, they believed, were preparing to inflict on them an exemplary punishment, and, in the dead of night, Châtillon's soldiers, together with a certain number of the wealthier burghers, were murdered in their sleep. The rallying cry of the artisans was *Schild en vriend*, and, in order to escape from being massacred, some of the French attempted to raise it, but they were betrayed by their accent and butchered with the rest.

This event, which henceforth went by the name of 'The Matins of Bruges'—by analogy with the Sicilian Vespers—made it possible for William of Juliers, an excellent soldier who possessed like de Coninc the gift of electrifying crowds, to organize a rising of nearly all the Flemish towns and of the whole population of the maritime district. Ghent alone remained under the sway of the *Leliaerts*, but seven hundred artisans escaped thence to join the democratic army which was to defend the soil of Flanders. This army repaired to Courtrai, the citadel of which was still occupied by a royal garrison, and it was under the walls of that town that one of the bloodiest battles in the whole history of Belgium took place, and one of those which have had most influence on its destiny. The royal army, commanded by Robert of Artois, was almost entirely composed of the nobility of Artois, Champagne, and Picardy, and a great number of *Leliaerts*. As foot-soldiers, it

possessed only Genoese archers fighting as mercenaries. The Flemish army, on the contrary, possessed no cavalry. It was entirely made up of infantry—weavers, fullers, and other artisans, as well as peasants from the Franc de Bruges, all armed with a heavy pike (*goedendag*). At first they gave way under the shock of the enemy cavalry, but immediately recovered themselves and threw back headlong into the ditches a crowd of knights whose charge had already been to some extent broken by these obstacles. The disposition of the ground was certainly favourable to the artisans, and they were helped as much by the talent and experience of their chief, William of Juliers, as by the blind hatred of the enemy, who, in their impatience to crush this rabble, flung themselves on it in disorder. But the chief factor which secured the victory to the Flemish democrats was the fierce and heroic energy with which they were inspired by the certainty that they had no alternative but to conquer or to die. They pitilessly massacred the knights, even those who surrendered to their mercy; there followed an appalling rout of the French army, the remains of which scattered that same evening as far as the outskirts of Tournai. The golden spurs which were collected from the battle-field were offered up by the victors as a trophy to Notre-Dame de Courtrai.

This defeat of the army of the *fleurs-de-lys*, as unexpected as it was humiliating, created a sensation throughout Europe. In order to explain away the catastrophe, Philip the Fair spread the story that the Flemings had drawn their enemies into a snare: that they concealed the ditches on the battle-field by covering them over with branches of trees. Curiously enough, this tale eventually secured credence in Flanders, and it has survived to the present day, not only in purely literary and artistic writings, but in historical works.

The battle of Courtrai excited, on the other hand, indescrib-



able enthusiasm in democratic centres—alike in Flanders, in Brabant, and in the city of Liège, and the effect was terrible. The battle had taken place on July 11. Three days later, de Coninc and William of Juliers entered Ghent as victors, Lille and Douai opened their gates to the conquerors. Disturbances, more or less violent, occurred in the towns of Brabant and Liège; at Liège the artisans exacted several concessions from the oligarchy, the chief of which was that one of the two ‘masters’ of the city should be chosen from among themselves. The *grands* made strenuous efforts to restore their authority; they formed an alliance with the knights of Hesbaye, but the undertaking miscarried, and a great number of them who took refuge in the church of Saint-Martin perished amid the flames of that building, which were kindled by popular bands. This day of the ‘Male-Saint-Martin’ had a result similar to that of the ‘Matins of Bruges’. The decimated patriciate of Liège was unable to recover itself and lost all political influence: the peace of Angleur (1313) provided that, in order to become a member of the municipal council of Liège, a man must first be inscribed on the roll of a trade.

In Flanders an aristocratic reaction took place with the support of the French monarchy. It only succeeded, however, after a long struggle, and it was never able to efface completely the memory of the democratic triumph of 1302, or to crush the hopes to which that triumph had given birth. Fresh disturbances were constantly breaking out, as a result of the economic crises arising from the strained relations between France and England—a conflict in which Flanders, being a French fief, was inevitably involved. The peasants of maritime Flanders rose in 1327 to destroy the rich; the weavers of Bruges instantly lent their support, but this time the rebellion was rapidly quelled by Philip of Valois, who crushed the democratic militia at Cassel (1328).

That same year was marked at Liège by the decline of the trade associations after the revolutionary movement which they had set on foot against Adolf of La Marck. On hearing of the rising in maritime Flanders they attacked the castles of the bishop, expelled his officials, and attempted to assume control of the government of the principality. It was in vain that Adolf of La Marck placed the city under an interdict; he implored the pope and the King of France to assist him against the 'brutal plebeians'. Adolf gathered round him a band of knights and, some weeks after the battle of Cassel, inflicted a terrible defeat on the army of Liège at Oreye. The prince-bishop restored his authority and, at the same time, transformed the municipal government of the city by dividing offices equally between the *grands* and the *petits*, and by suppressing the trade associations as political bodies.

The social conflicts were soon to revive with increased violence. A second democratic outbreak marked the beginning of the Hundred 'Years' War, as the result of the rupture of economic relations between England and Flanders.

Since the death of Robert of Bethune (1322), the real interests of Flanders had been entirely misunderstood by the new count, who was a mere instrument in the hands of the King of France. Louis of Nevers, Robert's grandson, who had been educated at the court of France and who was surrounded by French advisers, was ignorant of the very language of his subjects (since the loss of Lille and Douai, Flanders had become entirely Flemish in language); married to a daughter of Philip V, he regarded himself as a 'seigneur' of the *fleurs-de-lys*. He consequently had no hesitation in appealing to his suzerain for assistance to suppress the rising of 1327-8; the battle of Cassel, which secured his restoration, had been a royal victory, and Louis of Nevers always displayed his

gratitude to Philip of Valois. When Edward III broke with Philip, the Count of Flanders rigorously enforced the royal ordinances respecting the war declared against England (1337). In accordance with feudal tradition, moreover, the count was obliged to render military service to his suzerain, but those traditions had no weight with the burghers, who were far more attentive to the interests of their towns than to the wishes of their overlord.

Among the leaders of the democratic movement appears the figure of James van Artevelde, a wealthy citizen of Ghent and one of the leading cloth merchants, who counted among his ancestors some of those rich cloth-dealers whose goods had been confiscated at the time of the conquest of Flanders by Philip the Fair. In order to preserve freedom of commercial intercourse between Flanders and England he advocated the neutrality of the country in the Anglo-French war. At the close of 1337 he organized a meeting of the artisans of Ghent, explained his views to them, and succeeded in overthrowing the oligarchical magistracy, which was devoted to the policy of the count. Some days later, he was elected captain of the chief parish in Ghent, that of Saint John, and at the same time he obtained the general direction of the affairs of the city. He at once entered into negotiations with the King of England, from whom he secured recognition of Flemish neutrality. His ascendancy soon became so great that he exercised a real dictatorship. Bruges and Ypres followed the example of Ghent, and the count himself dared not do otherwise than sanction the neutrality of Flanders, which implied a similar recognition from the King of France. In a short while Ghent received letters from the two rival kings sanctioning Flemish neutrality. The prestige of van Artevelde was then immense, so great, indeed, that, according to a contemporary chronicler, the people venerated him as the equal of the

Saviour. When Edward III landed at Antwerp with the flower of his chivalry, the Count of Flanders was, in a sense, a prisoner in the hands of van Artevelde: On August 2, 1338, the captain of Ghent captured the castle of the counts and caused one of the advisers of Louis of Nevers to be killed there. Meanwhile, Edward III, in his capacity of Vicar of the Empire, a title conferred on him by Lewis the Bavarian, issued a summons to all the imperial vassals, including the Count of Flanders, many of whose fiefs were, in actual fact, imperial, and ordered them to fight against the King of France, as 'the enemy of the empire'. Louis of Nevers vainly attempted to bring about a reaction with the help of the *Leliaerts*; twice he secretly left the country, refusing all reconciliation with van Artevelde. Ghent, meanwhile, inclined more and more towards an alliance with England, and demanded from the King of France the restoration of French Flanders, which was one of its sources of corn-supply.

But the most characteristic sign of the change in the direction of policy brought about by James van Artevelde was the commercial and defensive alliance concluded between Flanders and Brabant at the end of 1339. As Louis of Nevers had definitely ranged himself on the side of his suzerain, van Artevelde caused the banker, Simon of Mirabel, seigneur of Haelen, to be appointed regent to govern the county in the absence of the count. As a matter of fact, van Artevelde continued to exercise a dictatorship and directed all the foreign policy. On his advice, Edward III, who had already taken the title of King of France, claimed actually to exercise the royal authority and, in his capacity as 'natural lord', caused feudal homage to be done to him by the three great Flemish cities in return for larger commercial privileges in England.

Despite the interdict which was laid upon Flanders at the request of Philip of Valois, and despite the intervention of the



pope in favour of the French king, the Anglo-Flemish alliance was maintained, and Flemish troops took part in the siege of Tournai. Van Artevelde, however, by attempting to direct the operations against that city independently, drew upon himself the hatred of John III, Duke of Brabant, who had always secretly favoured the policy of the King of France, and a truce which was concluded between the warring kings brought the siege of Tournai to an end. This check clearly impaired the prestige of van Artevelde, but he was still more seriously compromised by the fact that Edward III found it impossible to fulfil his engagements; he was unable to furnish the amount of wool which he had promised in face of the unyielding opposition of a section of the English people. He had, further, been still less able to furnish food for the support of the Flemish population. Scarcity, resulting from the state of war, produced serious troubles, especially at Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres. At Ghent, van Artevelde found himself opposed by the trade of weavers, and especially by its head, Gerard Denys, who prepared his overthrow. In the course of a riot, van Artevelde was murdered in his own house (1345). This murder, however, did not, as had been expected, bring the English alliance to an end; it was maintained by the demagoguery of the weavers.

It is somewhat difficult to form a correct estimate of the character of van Artevelde. Froissart has popularized a highly-coloured, but somewhat imaginative, portrait of the celebrated dictator of Ghent. Contemporary chroniclers hardly enable us to do more than divine some traits in the character of this great figure, and these, moreover, have often been wrongly interpreted. Thus, the surname of 'Sage homme', which posterity has given to van Artevelde, rose from the fact that this expression was used in an entirely different sense by the chroniclers of that period from the sense in which it was used

at a later date. 'Sage homme' meant, in the fourteenth century, a man of law, a master. The 'sage homme de Gand' was, therefore, no more than the dictator of Ghent. But, whatever may be the real truth, the part played by van Artevelde was not lacking in epic grandeur. It is proved that no Count of Flanders ever exercised such a measure of power or acquired such prestige, even in the time of the Flemish monarchy, as did this burgher of Ghent.

A year after the death of van Artevelde, the regent of Flanders was put to death by order of Louis of Nevers, who, some days later, himself fell at Cressy, fighting in the ranks of the royal army. The city of Ghent fell under the control of the weavers, whose domination was, in its turn, destroyed by a coalition between the other trades and the wealthy burghers, and as a result of the constantly increasing disputes between the three chief towns of Flanders.

Profiting from this state of disorder, the new count, Louis of Male, was able to secure the recognition of his authority and to make peace with the King of England in 1347. In no case, however, did the party of the *fleurs-de-lys* regain its power; the aristocratic régime was dead.

Like their sister towns in Flanders, the cities of Brabant and Liège felt the effect of the struggle between France and England, and saw the lower class of their citizens take advantage of economic crises to demand a share in the government. The democratic movement was especially vigorous in the principality of Liège, over the capital of which the *petits* regained control. A preliminary rising led by one of the 'masters', the furrier Peter Andricas, failed (1331), but some years later the cause of the lower class definitely triumphed. The letter of Saint Jacques established an equilibrium between the two sections of the urban population: each section was equally represented in all municipal offices (1343).

In the second half of the fourteenth century a third period of democratic disturbances begins in all the important towns. It coincided with the resumption of hostilities between France and England, but the ever-increasing competition of the English cloth-merchants lengthened the period of disorder and made it more stormy.

From about 1355 to 1380 a regular series of revolts took place alternating with aristocratic reactions. This time, the towns of Brabant were the most disturbed. At first special favours had been lavished on them by the English kings; hence they were the more severely affected by the protectionist measures which England adopted at this particular period. Their prosperity was also diminished by the annexation of Antwerp to Flanders, brought about by Louis of Male in 1357; this great market was thus dominated by their Flemish rivals.

At Louvain the cause of the 'vulgar' found an ardent defender in the person of one of the prince's officials, Peter Coutereel, the bailiff. Belonging to one of the wealthy families of that town, and wielding in his capacity of bailiff very far-reaching authority, Coutereel, with the help of the artisans, overthrew the oligarchy of the patriciate. But this part he played was limited to the capital of Brabant and did not, like that of van Artevelde, influence general policy.

In 1359 he refused to execute a judgement which the sheriffs had pronounced, the discharge of a fishmonger, arrested by his agents. The sheriffs retorted by ceasing to consider him a ducal official. He then complained to the prince of the extravagant pretensions of the shrievalty of Louvain and incited the artisans to free themselves from the oppression of which they were the victims. The trades organized themselves as an armed force, seized the communal house, and imprisoned a certain number of the aristocracy (1360). The revolt ended in a division of municipal powers between the aristocracy

and the commons, but, in reality, Coutereel exercised a kind of dictatorship. The majority of the aristocracy refused to co-operate in political reform, and brought about the failure of the new administration. Having large fortunes at their disposal they coalesced against the destroyers of their traditional privileges. They were, moreover, supported by the aristocracy of the other towns and by the majority of the petty nobility of the rural districts, to whom they were related. Many of them went into exile and found a warm reception in the neighbouring castles, in which they took refuge like beasts in their dens. The financial resources which they commanded attracted to their side Duke Wenceslas, who was always short of money. He banished Coutereel with some of his most devoted partisans, and restored the aristocratic régime. But ere long a fresh revolt broke out, and this time the duke granted a charter inaugurating a regular system of proportional representation for the different groups of the urban population, analogous to that which had already existed at Liège since 1343.

The old city did not even yet find peace. It suffered from the counterstroke of the revolution, provoked in Flanders by the weavers of Ghent, and its streets were once more the scene of bloody conflicts, while the castles of the surrounding plain sheltered the irreconcilable patricians. At the close of the year 1378 some of these brought about at Brussels the assassination of the plebeian burgomaster of Louvain, which caused a violent riot among the artisans of that town. In the course of it a certain number of patrician magistrates were thrown from the windows of the house in which they sat. Finally the duke ordered the banishment of the leaders of the two rival parties. The political equilibrium which was then established, through the employment of the system of 1378, was a singular contrast to the unstable constitution of the Flemish towns, where



the different trades were constantly contending for predominance.

The most dramatic episode of this third phase of democratic unrest occurred in Flanders. In 1379, Louis of Male having authorized the people of Bruges to construct a canal from the Lys to their city, in order to facilitate the transport of grain, the men of Ghent found in this an attack on the privileges of their city, which was the centre of the wheat trade. Yoens, the head of the boatmen of Ghent, went with armed troops and cut in pieces the diggers of Bruges who were working at this canal. The Ghent weavers profited by this opportunity to possess themselves of municipal power, and the cloth-workers followed their example in Bruges, Ypres, and many other towns. Everywhere demagoguery triumphed, amid violence and pillage.

Louis of Male contrived, however, to quell the rebels, except at Ghent, where Philip van Artevelde, son of the great tribune, took the command. The latter first led the army of Ghent to Bruges, into which town he penetrated after routing its forces at Beverhoutsveld. In order to subdue Ghent, the count was compelled to appeal to the aid of the King of France. Charles VI hastened to supply the required assistance, the more willingly because he held that the Flemings were schismatic as being partisans of Urban VI. He considered it an act of piety to make war against them. His troops encountered the army of Philip van Artevelde at Westroosebeke (1382); they had not much difficulty in surrounding that unorganized mass in which the men of Ghent alone fought with tenacity, and rather than surrender allowed themselves to be killed to the last man. The king's army had no more pity for them 'than if they were dogs', said Froissart. Philip van Artevelde himself was suffocated in the crowd. His corpse was found in a ditch; Charles VI, on recognizing it, caused it to be hanged on a tree.

The French army then set fire to Courtrai, after carrying off the golden spurs of the knights who had fallen at the battle of 1302. All the Flemish towns surrendered except Ghent, which maintained a desperate resistance until 1385. Louis of Male died without seeing the end of the struggle (1384).

The new count, Philip the Bold, consented to negotiate with the rebel town, proclaimed an amnesty, and confirmed the privileges of Ghent. He appeared to admit of a compromise between his sovereign prerogative and the urban franchises, and to be willing to accept the two irreconcilable principles formulated at the time in these words: 'Let the count be a free lord and his people a free lord.'

In most of the towns the democratic movement had ended by establishing a kind of proportional representation of the different social groups in the town councils and magistracies. At Ghent, for example, the three 'members' of the town were the burghers, the weavers, and the little trades. But, in other places, the weavers did not enjoy so important a position. At Brussels, where the aristocratic régime continued until 1421, the weavers were confounded with the mass of the other trades, which were grouped in 'nations' or political corporations, and the central governing body of the city consisted of the patriciate and these nations.

#### *v. Defensive Alliances and Territorial Agglomerations*

Their common economic needs and the similarity of their social evolution brought together the Belgian principalities, which had, at first, seemed likely to follow very different political destinies. The preponderance of the urban element made in most cases the interests of commerce and industry the ruling influence, with the result that the aims pursued were usually pacific. At an early date the towns tended to settle their disputes by arbitration rather than by force of arms. Just as

they revolted against the old barbaric methods of trial, such as ordeal by battle and the other 'judgements of God', so they protested against recourse to violent methods of settling dynastic and feudal questions. They favoured friendly arrangements and defensive alliances.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, an agreement between Flanders and Brabant established a commission of arbitration to deal with the differences that might arise between the two principalities. In 1328 Brabant, Hainault, and Holland undertook to settle in the same way their frontier disputes. The era of feudal wars was definitely closed, and to this result the Flemish and Brabançon cities contributed in no small degree. It was thanks to them that, as early as 1337, an agreement was reached between their respective princes with the object of preventing 'disputes, discords, and perilous wars', and of rendering mutual assistance in the event of either of the two principalities being attacked. A mixed commission was appointed to examine 'the wrongs, grievances, or annoyances' which the inhabitants of either principality might bring to its notice, and to give satisfaction to the plaintiffs by causing the guilty parties, whether officials of the prince or subjects, to appear before the competent tribunals. The Flemish commissioners included the banker, Simon de Mirabel, the friend of James van Artevelde and later the regent of Flanders.

Two years afterwards the alliance between the two great principalities was drawn closer by the efforts of van Artevelde himself, who, however, did not take part in the actual drawing up of the diplomatic act. This was the celebrated treaty of 1339. By it, commercial freedom and mutual assistance in event of attack were guaranteed. It was stipulated that the two countries should, henceforth, have a common coinage, and it established a council of arbitration charged with the duty of settling peaceably disputes which might arise between

the two contracting parties. It was an important stage in the unification of all these principalities, 'full of a mass of people unable to exist without trade'.

Some months later, Hainault adhered to this essentially commercial alliance. In 1347 the district of Liège concluded a similar treaty with Brabant. Finally, an article in the famous Brabançon charter, known as the Joyous Entry of Jane and Wenceslas (1356), declared that the union of Flanders and of the country of Liège with Brabant was indissoluble. These alliances were only temporary, but they suffice to bear witness to the common aspirations and to the common needs of the more important Belgian principalities. They are the result of the doctrine, clearly expressed in the treaty of 1339, that 'commerce can only be carried on in a land which enjoys peace, good order, and freedom'.

The economic unification of the Low Countries made progress despite the rivalry of the princely houses. It was further favoured by the disappearance of several important families, that disappearance having the effect of grouping together principalities by means of a personal union. In the early days of feudalism the disappearance of a princely line had generally led to partitions. At this period it is interesting to note that each principality constituted a distinct entity, a species of tiny nation, and that its territory was, owing to this fact, regarded as being indivisible; it belonged rather to the people than to the prince. This entirely modern conception was, in a large measure, due to the towns.

The House of Holland was the first to become extinct, with John I, in 1299. His successor was his uncle, John II of Avesnes, who was already Count of Hainault, and, consequently, these two essentially distinct principalities came to share the same political destinies. But the princes of the House of Avesnes proved able to foster both the agricultural



and feudal interests of Hainault, and the commercial and urban interests of Holland and of their outlying possessions in Friesland and Zealand.

William I (1304-37) was especially distinguished for his diplomatic ability. Towards all his neighbours he constantly observed the strictest neutrality, and towards the King of France, the ancient patron of his family, he adopted an attitude of complete independence. He maintained excellent relations with England, to the great profit of his towns in Holland; his brother, John of Beaumont, at the head of the chivalry of Hainault, assisted the Prince of Wales (Edward III) to seize the throne, and the marriage of that prince to Philippa, daughter of William I, cemented the alliance between the Plantagenets and the House of Avesnes on the eve of the Hundred Years' War. After having acquired a great reputation, the House of Avesnes became extinct, in 1345, with William II (William IV of Holland). His domains then passed to the House of Bavaria; Margaret of Avesnes, having married the Emperor Lewis the Bavarian, left her paternal inheritance to one of his sons, William the Bavarian. His accession was not unattended with difficulties. The King of England, Edward III, who, through his wife Philippa, had also a claim to the succession, only consented to abandon his rights in return for certain advantages, among them the marriage of William with Matilda of Lancaster. Eventually, however, the whole patrimony of the House of Avesnes passed intact into the hands of the House of Bavaria, which became firmly rooted in the Low Countries, despite the rival House of Luxemburg, which also desired to obtain the preponderance in that region.

The death of John III (1355), last duke of the House of Brabant—the oldest of all the great houses of the Low Countries, since it traced its descent from Lambert I—led to disputes between his two sons-in-law, Wenceslas of Luxemburg and

Louis of Male, and these disputes resulted in territorial losses for Brabant. To maintain the indivisibility of Brabançon territory, the nobles and towns of the duchy had taken the precaution of indemnifying the claimants who might have disputed the rights of Princess Jane, eldest daughter of the late duke and wife of Wenceslas. However, Louis of Male announced that he was not satisfied with the sum of money which had been assigned to him, and demanded the town of Malines. He sent an army into Brabant, and that country, taken by surprise, could offer no effective resistance. A victory, gained at Scheut, to the west of Brussels, secured Louis the majority of the Brabançon towns, but the citizens of Brussels, commanded by Everard Tserclaes, expelled the Flemish garrison from their town, and soon Jane and Wenceslas, who had taken refuge in Limburg, were recalled by their 'good towns' of Brabant. The Brabançon towns and their princes, however, were forced to submit to the loss of the command of the Scheldt. The Treaty of Ath ceded to the Count of Flanders Malines in full sovereignty and Antwerp as a Brabançon fief.

The territorial power of Flanders was still further increased as a result of the able policy of the last count of the House of Dampierre. Unlike his father, Louis of Male at first showed himself particularly friendly to England, but abandoned that connexion when Charles V, King of France, promised him the restoration of Walloon Flanders in return for the marriage of Margaret, sole heiress of the count, with Philip the Bold, brother of the king. This marriage took place in 1369, and it appeared to be probable that Flanders would in future be a mere satellite of France. Louis of Male, as has been seen, was also induced to beg for royal intervention on the occasion of the famous revolt caused by the democrats of Ghent in 1379.

The accession of the House of Burgundy in Flanders (1384) marks a new epoch in the history of the Belgian principalities.

They henceforth formed four main groups: (1) Flanders, with its various outlying possessions east of the Scheldt; (2) Brabant, Limburg, and Luxemburg; (3) Hainault, Holland, and Zealand; and (4) the country of Liège, the only episcopal principality remaining a territorial power, and which was increased in 1361 (as a result mainly of the energetic action of the towns) by the acquisition of the county of Looz (the modern Limburg, north of Tongres and Saint-Trond).

#### *vi. Intellectual and Artistic Development*

Despite the wonderful development of the towns, the world of culture retained, until the end of the fourteenth century, a fundamentally feudal and ecclesiastical character. It derived its inspiration from the court of France and more particularly from the University of Paris. In the words of Maerlant himself, the father of all the Flemish poets, France was then the land of all knowledge and all philosophy. It is accordingly not surprising that the courts of the princes and seigneurs continued to be important centres of French literature, and above all those of Flanders and Hainault, which were so closely connected with the court of France. From Hainault came the first great writer of French prose in the fourteenth century, Jean Le Bel, Canon of Liège (died 1370). Attached to John of Beaumont, brother of William of Avesnes, he shared in the adventurous life of that prince and, with others, accompanied him to England, where he took part in the knightly exploits of the 'valiant and gentle King Edward'. He was a member of the warlike lesser nobility of Hesbaye, which explains his adherence to an essentially knightly ideal. In his chronicles he celebrates famous sword-strokes, brilliant fêtes, romantic adventures.

The work of Jean Le Bel was the model for the work of the greatest *trouvère* and historian of this period, Froissart, of

Valenciennes (died 1410). This 'gentle story-teller' (*diseur*) was a friend of all the princes, but lived mainly at the court of Philippa, wife of Edward III, of Jane and Wenceslas, Dukes of Brabant, and of Guy of Blois. His 'fair words' and his 'fine stories' charmed the courts of Windsor and Blois no less than they charmed those of Beaumont and Tervueren. His many journeys enabled him to secure information with regard to great feats of arms from eyewitnesses. Thanks to his knowledge of the two national languages he could converse as freely with Flemings and Brabançons as with the men of Hainault and Liège. At the request of his patrons he wrote those chronicles which reflect the gorgeous and elegant feudal life of that period, and are marked by a real desire for impartiality. Froissart no more regarded himself as a Frenchman than did Le Bel. His point of view varies with that of the princes whom he served, and his attitude towards France depends on that adopted by each of his patrons in turn.

The vogue of courtly literature was so great that bourgeois authors, writing in the language of the people, laboured only to copy it. They interested themselves specially in knightly exploits, in genealogies, and in the deeds of princes and feudal lords. Their didactic tendency, however, is a new and highly significant fact. By it they satisfied the demands of the bourgeois mind, essentially practical and positive. Maerlant led the way in this respect. The Brabançon van Velthem continued Maerlant's *Spiegel historiael* (1316), and his compatriot, Jan Boendale (died 1365), wrote not only the *Gestes* of the dukes of Brabant but a number of didactic and moral works. The chronicler, Jean d'Outremeuse of Liège (died 1403), like Boendale a clerk of the shrievalty, wrote similar works, though of a more romantic and more legendary character.

The clergy no longer confined themselves to Latin, which was then the language of learning and of the Church. They



followed the example of the urban writers and began to make use of the vulgar tongues. The first prose writer of the Low Countries was the Augustinian monk, Jan Ruusbroec (died 1381), the celebrated Prior of Groenendael. His writings, largely composed amid the solitude of the forest of Soignes, where his monastery was, exalt the contemplative life and endeavour to spread mysticism to laymen, thus developing it, if not outside, at least side by side with, the Church. One of his disciples, Gerard Groote, of Deventer (died 1384), founded the order of the Brothers of the Common Life, who, despite the opposition of the monks, spread among the people a number of edifying tracts.

If literature, despite its constantly increasing popular character, scarcely yet departs during the fourteenth century from traditional ideas, the plastic arts reveal a striking originality, really national, and heralding the splendid renaissance of the following century. It was due to the efflorescence of city life, so strikingly manifested in Belgium, to which it gave henceforth a distinctive character. The towns rivalled the courts of princes in luxury, and became the chief artistic centres; goldsmiths, painters, sculptors, formed constantly increasing corporations and devoted their labour not only to the decoration of the churches of the towns, but also to that of the market-places, the halls of the gilds, and the houses of the rich burghers. The lay society in which they lived influenced the form of their productions, which are distinguished from the monastic works of earlier periods by their increasing realism. The *tombiers*, or sculptors of funereal monuments, had been the first 'image-makers', in the true sense of that phrase, since they laboured to reproduce faithfully the features of the dead. From them began the movement of artistic reform.

Architecture turned towards a new ideal and lost its exclusively religious and feudal character. It emancipated itself

by throwing off French influence; it adapted itself to town dwellings, and by its exuberance expressed the extraordinary vitality which marked the Belgian cities. If the sheriff's house at Malines and the cloth hall at Louvain (1317) still retain a certain simplicity, the town hall at Bruges (1376) began the series of magnificent and elegant municipal palaces which exhibited all their splendour in the fifteenth century.

Despite new tendencies in literary and artistic life, religious sentiment remained very active in the towns, no less than in the rural districts, but it felt the effect of the constant social and economic crises which disturbed them both. Piety became exalted in the working classes and, by its alliance with mysticism, produced numerous heresies. During epidemics, as for example during the great black plague of 1348, bodies of Flagellants, who devoted themselves to public mortifications, spread over the country and secured many disciples.

Religious fervour also showed itself in the spread of the cult of the Virgin. At the end of the fourteenth century the people of Bruges attributed to her intervention the defeat of Philip van Artevelde at Westroosebeke. The strengthening of the faith of the laity was due partly to the preaching of the monks, but above all to the spread of books of edification in the vulgar tongue, favoured by the order of the Brothers of the Common Life, who, without abandoning their lay character, lived together under a rule of work and prayer and especially employed themselves in education. Their schools replaced the old monastic and cathedral schools, which had fallen into profound decay—above all, those of Liège, once so celebrated. By the influence of these new places of education the religious spirit permeated more and more the lay population, and it is possible to assert that in the fourteenth century religious sentiment was secularized.

## *The Consolidation with Burgundy (1384-1555)*

### *i. Territorial Policy*

IN the second half of the fourteenth century there were three great dynasties rivalling each other in influence and pursuing, above all, a family policy—they aimed at contracting advantageous matrimonial alliances. The dynasty of Luxemburg disposed of a large part of the former Lotharingia, not including the principality of Liège, the territory of which had, at one period, formed the essential part of it. The House of Bavaria held two groups of principalities, the resources of which were both varied and abundant, but which were separated from each other by the solid mass of Flanders: Hainault and its dependencies and Holland with its outlying territories in Friesland and Zealand. As for the House of Burgundy, it controlled the richest and most coherent territory, Flanders and its numerous dependencies situated within the limits of the empire.

It is true that they were in conflict with an ambitious suzerain who was eager to transform 'the Flanders' into royal territory. Even during the reign of Charles VI, Philip the Bold, despite the great influence which he possessed over his nephew, was obliged to oppose vigorously the incorporation of Walloon Flanders in the domains of the *fleurs-de-lys*. But, on the other hand, there were various occasions when he was able, very dexterously, to use the royal authority for his own ends. From the outset, indeed, the chances of the three rival dynasties were far from equal. The House of Burgundy enjoyed a great

advantage, not merely by reason of the extent of its territorial possessions, held, as they were, by a single individual, and of their economic wealth, but also on account of the ascendancy which it exercised through its kinship with the reigning House of France. Its diplomatic action was, in consequence, far more efficient than that of the houses of Luxemburg and Bavaria.

The Burgundian dynasty was assured of success; and, provided that it maintained its independence as against the Crown, it would be able to bring about the political consolidation of the Belgian principalities, which were already united by community of economic and social interest. Moreover, it was particularly favoured by circumstances. The House of Luxemburg entirely disappeared from Brabant immediately after the reign of its first representative in that duchy, Wenceslas, who died childless (1383). His widow, Jane, who was in close and friendly relations with the court of France and the princely courts which gravitated round it, was easily won over to the cause of Philip the Bold. She willingly assisted to bring about the marriage of his eldest son John—later surnamed the Fearless—with Margaret of Bavaria, and at the same time that of Margaret of Burgundy, sister to John, with William of Hainault and Holland. This double marriage, by defeating the hopes of a matrimonial union cherished by England, rendered the position of the Burgundian dynasty impregnable in the Low Countries.

When William, Duke of Guelders, endeavoured to provoke a quarrel between France and England, so as to unsettle the political situation between the Ardennes and the sea, Philip had no difficulty in frustrating his attempt. He replied to the appeal of Jane, whose states William was attacking, by sending a French army to the frontier of Guelders, and there, in consideration of the assistance which he had rendered to the



duchess, he presented himself before the States of Brabant and proposed that, in return for the restoration of Malines and Antwerp, he should be recognized as heir. In face of the protests of Wenzel, King of the Romans, whom Jane had already acknowledged as heir, the Brabançon States hesitated. Then Jane herself declared (1390) that her niece, Margaret of Male, wife of Philip, should succeed her, 'by reason and right of nature', and that, moreover, after her death, Philip was the only prince capable of assuring peace and quiet to her states. This was a public slight on imperial power, which had, it is true, steadily declined since the twelfth century. And the fact that the emperor was powerless to enforce the fulfilment of a pledge which affected the future of his own family was a striking manifestation of the independence of the former Lotharingian principalities.

The Brabançons, anxious to preserve their territorial autonomy, secured from Philip the assurance that he intended his second son, Anthony, to become the successor of Jane. But the destinies of Brabant were definitely linked with those of Flanders, and those two principalities were to constitute the foundation of the Burgundian state of the Low Countries, or Lower Burgundy. In 1404 John the Fearless succeeded his father, and two years later his brother Anthony succeeded Jane of Brabant. The two brothers agreed to give each other support and protection, and worked together for the extension of Burgundian influence. In contrast to his father, John the Fearless devoted his chief attention to the affairs of the Low Countries, where he resided by preference. His palace of *Prinsenhof*, at Ghent, was more often honoured by his presence than was the Hôtel d'Artois at Paris. His definite aim was to found a new state, whereas his father had only aimed at creating for himself a solid basis in the north of France, to enable him to conduct personally the government of that

kingdom. John the Fearless certainly interfered in the affairs of France : as is known, he caused the Duke of Orleans to be assassinated in order to secure power, but his chief aim was the development of his authority in the Low Countries. On the death of his brother Anthony, who fell in the battle of Agincourt (1415), he demanded and obtained the lease of Luxemburg. This former county, now a duchy, was the apanage of Anthony's widow, Elizabeth of Goerlitz. Comprising almost the whole extent of the Ardennes, it had, unlike the Burgundian principalities, preserved its rural and feudal character, but possessed a strategic value of the highest order, as a rampart against Germany. The German suzerains were absolutely devoid of power at that period, but their successors might some day be able to resume the policy of the Saxon emperors and to revive historical rights which had become entirely obsolete. Moreover, Luxemburg would help to form a connecting link between the duchy of Burgundy and the Low Countries. John the Fearless had already intervened in the principality of Liège in support of the bishop, his brother-in-law, John of Bavaria, and the victory which he had won at Othée in 1408 over the artisans of Liège, who had revolted against the latter, secured to him the protectorship of the principality.

The territorial consolidation of the Belgian provinces had thus made great advances by the time this prince expiated the murder of the Duke of Orleans by being assassinated himself on the bridge of Montereau (1419). Philip the Good, therefore, is wrongly considered the founder of the dominion of Burgundy ; in point of fact, he merely reaped the fruits of the policy of his father and his grandfather. His enormous financial resources, together with his diplomatic skill, enabled him still further to increase his power. He disposed at will of the bishoprics of Cambrai and Tournai, and applied to the



principality of Utrecht the same kind of protectorate as to Liège. In 1421 he bought the district of Namur. Brabant, with its dependencies, passed to him after his two cousins, John IV and Philip of Saint-Pol, had reigned there in succession; neither of them leaving any male issue, their inheritance reverted to the elder branch of the House of Burgundy (1430). Three years later, after long and tragic conflicts, Philip the Good dispossessed his cousin, Jacqueline of Bavaria, of the counties of Hainault and Holland.

His reconciliation with Charles VII, whom he had at first vigorously opposed as being responsible for the murder of John the Fearless, secured for him the county of Boulogne, Artois, and, subject to a right of repurchase, a group of lordships on the Somme (Treaty of Arras, 1435). He then acquired Luxemburg from Elizabeth of Goerlitz (1435-41). Later he annexed the district of Utrecht, imposed a protectorate on Guelders, and in Liège replaced John of Heinsberg by his nephew, Louis of Bourbon. It was his dream to restore the ancient Lotharingian kingdom of Mid-Francia, adding to it Flanders, and he was even ambitious of reviving the tradition of the Crusades, and of thereby putting himself at the head of Western Christendom.

In 1454, in the course of splendid fêtes given at Lille, he, with the lords of his court, took a solemn oath, before a pheasant solemnly brought in for this purpose, to assume the cross. He was unable, however, to fulfil the 'oath of the pheasant'. Being anxious to erect into a kingdom his imperial fiefs, which included almost all the former Lotharingia, he went to Germany to meet Frederic and to demand from him the grant of the royal title. But the emperor avoided him, and even failed to attend the meeting which had been arranged at Ratisbon. He was unwilling to aid in the re-establishment of a Lotharingian kingdom, which would have involved the definite



loss of a large number of fiefs to the empire; he would not even invest Philip with these fiefs.

So rapid and so brilliant a rise to fortune necessarily excited jealousy. Vassal though it was, the House of Burgundy rivalled that of Valois. Charles VII, and, later, Louis XI, devoted all their energies to holding it in check. Louis XI secretly won over the House of Croy, the counsellors of Philip the Good, but the duke's son, Count Charles of Charolais, succeeded in unmasking the schemes of the king and his accomplices.

As early as 1465 Charles was appointed 'lieutenant-general' by his father, who had become old and infirm. Possessed of a thoroughly southern temperament and insanely violent in disposition, Charles, who was later surnamed the Rash, engaged in the most ambitious and dangerous enterprises. Instead of employing diplomacy, he believed that he could overcome every obstacle by force and terror; the cruelty with which he punished the towns of the district of Liège for their alliance with Louis XI amazed contemporary observers, accustomed though they were to such brutal exhibitions of princely 'justice'.

Charles had imposed upon the district of Liège a humiliating peace at the time when he forced Louis XI to restore to him the Somme towns, those 'keys of France' (1465). But the King of France still hoped to rouse the men of Liège against his rival. The town of Dinant, moreover, controlled by the party of the lesser artisans, to whom were joined a crowd of outlaws, foreigners, and adventurers, had not accepted the terms of peace exacted by Charles, and adopted a provocative and hostile attitude. But, on August 18, 1466, Charles appeared with an army under the walls of Dinant, and, thanks to his artillery, reduced the town after a seven days' siege. His vengeance was terrible. Determined to make an example,

he ordered the sack of the city, which was then set on fire; only the churches and religious houses were spared (August 28). In the following year, Liège, which had given shelter to a number of the ruined citizens of Dinant and which was seduced by Louis XI's promises of support, adopted in its turn a recalcitrant attitude. The war party, which had adopted the name of 'Vrais Liégeois', established a revolutionary government, in which Raes de Heers, a knight of the Looz district, a true *condottiere* eager for adventure, played the part of practical dictator. The news of the death of Philip the Good caused deep delight at Liège, and it was decided to assume the offensive. But the army of the city was defeated at Brusthem (October 27, 1467). Charles proceeded to occupy the principality, ordered all its towns to be dismantled, and the land to be wasted with fire and sword; he established in it one of his most faithful adherents, the Sire de Humbercourt, who really ruled the district in place of its bishop, Louis of Bourbon.

In order to paralyse the King of France, Charles had allied with the King of England, Edward IV, and in 1468 he married Margaret of York, the sister of that monarch. He then believed himself to be invincible, while many German princes, such as the Duke of Bavaria, the Elector Palatine, and the Archbishop of Cologne, sought his alliance, and the emperor himself offered him the title of king. But Louis XI constantly placed all manner of obstacles in his path: he encouraged the exiled of Liège to undertake a fresh revolt, and they actually returned in the absence of the bishop and the governor and roused the workpeople with the cry, 'Vivent le roi et les franchises!' Charles was aware of his rival's plots and forced him to accompany him to the punishment of the rebels. Unwalled and almost unarmed, Liège made a desperate resistance. Goes de Strailhe, with some hundreds of men from Franchimont, attempted during the night to capture Charles and the

king, but they all fell under the swords of the Burgundians. The city was then pillaged, sacked, and burned ; its inhabitants murdered or drowned in crowds in the Meuse. Charles wished to destroy the very name 'Liège', and to call the place Brabant. Sparing none, he aroused the hostility of the emperor, Frederic III, by his pretensions to the crown of King of the Romans. After seizing Guelders, which the old duke, Arnold, had left him against its wishes, he supported Ruprecht von der Pfalz, Archbishop of Cologne, against the emperor. The defeat which he suffered at his fruitless siege of Neuss was more or less compensated by the conquest of Lorraine, but he then plunged headlong into a fantastic enterprise, the conquest of the Rhone valley from Lyons to the Mediterranean, by which Italy would have been laid open to him. His furious obstinacy completely ruined him ; Burgundian power was shattered at the battles of Granson and Morat, and the catastrophe of Nancy struck the final blow (1477). The territorial cohesion of the Low Countries was immediately broken ; each principality began to pursue its individual interests as a result of a reaction against arbitrary monarchical power.

Louis XI availed himself of the opportunity to dismember Flanders. He even offered to conquer Brabant for Edward IV, King of England, but that prince answered that this country, like Flanders, was 'too difficult to hold', and that England, which carried on a great trade there, would not willingly declare war against it.

Louis XI would, however, have succeeded in breaking up the Burgundian State of the Low Countries but for the intervention of Frederic III and his son, Maximilian. He had no difficulty in seducing the representatives of the Flemish towns, unpractised and simple diplomatists who were easily taken in by the assumed frankness of the wily monarch, and

willingly accepted the scheme of a marriage between Mary, Charles's sole heir, and the dauphin. They also let themselves be persuaded that the duchess was surrounded by traitors, and this conviction was further strengthened when Mary, on her return to Ghent, having already been affianced by her father to Maximilian, met their suggestions with an explicit and obstinate refusal, despite the pressure which was brought to bear on her. The people of Ghent, on their own initiative, arrested the councillors Hugonet and Humbercourt, and illegally condemned them to death. By a peculiar irony of fate, these victims of anti-royal policy were afterwards held to have favoured the schemes of Louis XI !

A violent and very rapid reaction took place, however, at the news that the King of France had broken his pledges and had sent a large army to invade Hainault and Artois. Immediately the cry of *Vive Bourgogne!* resounded, and the towns closed their gates. Saint-Omer and Valenciennes offered a victorious resistance. Arras fell and its inhabitants were expelled, but the havoc wrought on the crops and the burning of towns and villages only served to stiffen the resistance of other places. At length Maximilian arrived with help, and then took place the marriage which united the Habsburg with the heiress of the Burgundian dominions, the consequences of which were to prove fatal to the Low Countries, since they were deprived until the nineteenth century of a national dynasty. The treasure of Burgundy—silver plate and precious stones—served to cover the cost of war. Despite a victory, won at Guinegate (1479), Maximilian was unable to compel Louis to make peace, and his position became extremely critical, when Mary of Burgundy unexpectedly died of injuries received by a fall from her horse (1482).

The Flemish towns refused to recognize Maximilian as regent and guardian of his two children, Philip and Margaret, and



demanded peace at any price. The people of Ghent even sent ambassadors to the king, who, in the name of Maximilian, negotiated a treaty at Arras which stipulated for a marriage between Margaret and the dauphin and settled Artois and other Burgundian territory on the princess as her dower. This last political act of Louis XI was a brilliant triumph for him. Ghent subordinated the whole of its foreign policy to its momentary interests, but its militia was unable to stand against the *lanzknechts* and other mercenaries of Maximilian. The town lost its rank as a princely residence, which it had acquired by monopolizing the regency and the guardianship of young Philip, and that prince was transferred to Malines.

However, the city of the Artevelde concluded an alliance with Charles VIII, the successor of Louis XI. Maximilian, taken prisoner during a riot at Bruges, found himself compelled to abolish monarchical government in order to recover his liberty. Anarchy, which was increased by the adherence of a great number of the nobility to the Ghentish movement, raged until the day when the forces of Albert of Saxony, Maximilian's lieutenant, succeeded in reducing Bruges (November 1490). Ghent resisted for nearly two years longer, but finally submitted to accept Maximilian as patron. In 1493 peace was concluded between the archduke and Charles VIII, and young Margaret of Austria, repudiated by the latter two years earlier, joined her brother at Malines.

Philip the Handsome, who attained his majority in 1494, at the age of sixteen, resumed the traditions of Burgundian policy and re-established the cohesion of the Low Countries. Having been brought up by Belgian nobles, his education was essentially national, and for a long time there was no visible sign that he was heir presumptive to the Archduke of Austria. He nevertheless fell under the influence of his father, and lent himself to the anti-French designs of Maximilian by marrying

Juana of Castile, daughter of his father's allies, Ferdinand and Isabella (1496).

But in 1500, when his wife found herself called upon to inherit some day the Spanish kingdoms, he completely changed his line of conduct and, on the death of his mother-in-law, Isabella, took the title of King of Castile. From that time he neglected the Low Countries, inaugurating the dynastic policy which was to be continued by his son, Charles V. For some centuries the destinies of the country of Belgium were to be associated with those of the great European powers.

The Belgian principalities, however, were not in subjection to these powers; they preserved an existence of their own, although they were unable to determine for themselves their international attitude. They remained the state of Burgundy. Maximilian formed them (1512) into the circle of Burgundy, which practically enjoyed complete independence. The principality of Liège alone, by reason of its character as an episcopal principality, retained its connexion with the empire, and was included in the circle of Westphalia.

The final phase of the territorial unification took place during the reign of Charles V, who devoted himself to consolidating and completing the work of his Burgundian ancestors. He annexed Friesland, which thus covered the Low Countries on the north (1523), seized the country of Utrecht and Overijssel from Charles of Egmont, Duke of Guelders (1528), acquired Groningen, which delivered itself into his hands to secure protection against the *lanzknechts* of the Duke of Guelders (1536), and finally completed the consolidation of the country by incorporating Drenthe, Guelders, and Zutphen, and by extending his protectorate to Cambrai. In the first war against Francis I, he had conquered Tournai, the ecclesiastical metropolis of Flanders and a commercial and military centre of the highest order, as well as its district, and he had definitely

secured possession of the ancient city of the Menapii. He then severed, once and for all, the slender feudal tie which still existed between Flanders and France and attached it to the circle of Burgundy. Finally, he formally separated the old Lotharingian principalities from the empire in order to secure them for his dynasty. From 1530 he declared his 'countries on this side' exempt from all imperial jurisdiction. In 1548 he imposed on the diet, assembled at Augsburg, a contract by which the Low Countries (not including the principality of Liège, which, enclosed in them, was under the protectorate of their princes)<sup>1</sup> constituted, from that time, one circle only, the circle of Burgundy, nominally placed under the protection of the empire, but, in reality, forming an independent and sovereign state. In order to preserve the territorial unity of this federative state, comprising seventeen provinces over which he reigned in his own right, Charles V, by the Pragmatic Sanction of 1549, regulated the law of succession. In this

<sup>1</sup> Charles, or rather his aunt, Margaret of Austria, Lieutenant-Governor (1506-30), who pursued with so much energy the 'Burgundian' policy, had as early as 1517 entered into negotiations with the Bishop of Liège, Erard de la Marck (1506-38), in order to detach him from the French alliance. These negotiations were very protracted, but resulted in 1518 in the Treaty of Saint-Trond; Erard agreed to swear to an alliance with Charles in return for a considerable pension and the promise of a Spanish bishopric and one or two Brabançon abbeys. The States of the principality did not allow themselves to be bought like their prince, and thus the district of Liège came under a Burgundian protectorate. Erard, however, would not be a mere tool in the hands of his protector. The nomination of an inquisitor-general of the Faith, which he secured from the pope in 1525, contributed to check greatly the State Inquisition of which Charles dreamed for the Low Countries. But Erard's three successors were previous instruments of Habsburg policy—Corneille de Berghes, 1538-44, who refused even to live at Liège, and who would not receive ordination as a priest; George of Austria (1544-57), who styled himself the 'humble chaplain' of Mary of Hungary; and Robert de Berghes (1557-63).

manner the indivisibility of the Low Countries, a dream of the dukes of Burgundy, was guaranteed ; the task undertaken by them was accomplished by the most illustrious representative of the House of Habsburg.

### *ii. Monarchical Centralization*

‘The people of this country are rather sovereign than subject.’ Such was the opinion of an English resident at Antwerp at the beginning of the sixteenth century, after a hundred years of monarchical action, and this opinion was confirmed by many foreigners. Thus it may well be imagined how great must have been the autonomy of each principality, and how strong a hold the ruling classes—clergy, nobility, and towns—must have had on their privileges, at the moment when Philip the Good undertook to merge the various principalities into one state and to place them under a system of central institutions.

The Burgundian ‘innovations’ were therefore badly received. Philip completely reorganized the ducal council, which was henceforth known as the Grand Council. By means of an ordinance, of 1446, he transformed it into a permanent governing college, which was a real instrument in the hands of the prince. The division of work led to the division of this council. Charles the Rash made it into two distinct colleges, charged with clearly defined functions. One of them, which preserved the name of the Grand Council, formed the Council of State ; the other, which received the name of Parliament and was established at Malines, became the supreme court for the whole Low Countries. The dukes of Burgundy especially increased the financial power of the government ; with jealous care they saw to the supply of their treasury by a highly developed system of institutions. It was by their too frequent recourse to direct taxation that they made themselves at times



so unpopular ; the aid or *bede*, which had been temporary and occasional, became one of the normal resources of the prince ; moreover, it became heavier and heavier, and eventually excessive during the time of the great wars of Charles the Rash. The provincial States accorded it to him first annually, then for several years. When, in 1471, Charles the Rash formed a permanent army,<sup>1</sup> he demanded, but was refused, the vote of a perpetual impost.

In order to facilitate and accelerate the grant of imposts, his father had created a new organization, the States-General. Instead of carrying on separate negotiations with each of the provinces, as had formerly been the practice, the prince assembled together delegates from them all (1463-5). He did not foresee that this 'innovation' would later favour autonomist tendencies and would serve as a check on absolutism.

Without destroying territorial institutions, the Burgundian princes perverted their working by superimposing on them other institutions designed to control them or partially to supplant them, such as the Chamber of Council (at once Court of Justice and Accounts) which was established at Lille by Philip the Bold and soon afterwards divided into the Chamber of Accounts at Lille and the Council of Flanders (the latter was definitely established at Ghent in 1463). Brabant and its

<sup>1</sup> This army, which consisted of 18,000 men, was formed of twenty 'companies of ordnance', each having a hundred 'lances'. Each lance constituted a military unit, composed of a man-at-arms, three archers, a culverineer, an arbalester, and a 'picquenaire'. The men-at-arms and the archers were mounted, the first being attended at his own cost by a page and a mounted swordsman. In addition to the companies of ordnance, Charles the Rash continued to employ mercenaries hired for the duration of a campaign, which type of soldiery had formed the only military establishment of his predecessors. The feudal and communal militia, badly equipped and undisciplined, were very rarely used by the dukes of Burgundy, who exacted money payments in lieu of military service from their vassals and towns.

dependencies and, finally, the other principalities, were placed under a similar administrative and judicial régime.

Among the privileged orders, the towns were particularly hostile to the introduction of the new régime, which was largely an imitation of the French monarchy. In Flanders, the 'three members'—Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres—were unwilling to surrender the general direction of the country. In Brabant, the States which fully represented the three orders, but in which the towns had the preponderance, frequently proved refractory on the demand of subsidies. The towns, however, weakened by their discords and internal strife, were unable to maintain the struggle against the prince, who, invoking the 'public good', found allies among the peasants and the small towns oppressed by the large. Philip the Good collaborated through his agents in the nomination of urban magistrates, audited their accounts, prevented the great communes from exploiting the rural districts and the little towns, and subjected the decisions of their tribunals to an appeal to his courts (councils) of justice. Bruges and Ghent were the only towns which offered an open and revolutionary resistance; they wished, at all costs, to maintain their prerogatives and their monopolies. The artisans of Bruges revolted in 1437, because Philip the Good had allowed Sluys and other neighbouring localities to shake off the yoke of Bruges. They massacred the soldiers of the duke, who himself narrowly escaped capture. But the men of Bruges were compelled to submit, and their chiefs were reduced to imploring mercy bare-footed and bare-headed. From that time forward, all attempts at rebellion were punished by confiscation of property. As for the town of Ghent, which had always been specially well treated by Philip the Good 'as his sovereign town of the country', it refused his proposed tax upon salt; sooner than pay this tax, which would hit the burghers as well as the inhabi-

tants of the rural districts, it preferred to grind down the latter, in order to be itself immune from taxation. It defied the duke by actually arrogating to itself the nomination of sheriffs in 1449. The plenary assembly of trades, or Collace, took upon itself the urban administration and proceeded to wholesale executions of the duke's partisans. Its militia was, however, unable to face a pitched battle against a regular army, and was crushed at Gavre (1453). Two thousand burghers were compelled to beg mercy from the duke, to pledge themselves to pay an enormous fine, and to wall up one of the gates of their city. Practices which were contrary to the text of the charters of Ghent were abolished, and, like Bruges, Ghent no longer formed a state in the state; hereafter it was 'a town like others'.

Charles the Rash brought upon himself the hatred of the large towns by attacking the municipal autonomy which had been respected by his ancestors; believing that despotism was necessary for the maintenance of order and equal justice for all, he began a process of levelling which he pursued with the passion and brutality which distinguished all his actions. He ruthlessly overrode traditions, disposing at his pleasure of communal magistracies and curbing the slightest attempt at independence. After the rebellion of Liège, provoked by Louis XI, he deprived the citizens of their privileges, transferred their *perron*—symbol of their franchises—to Bruges, and caused their town to be destroyed, thus terrorizing the proud communes of his hereditary principalities. He compelled the town of Ghent, which had shown sympathy with the revolt of Liège, to humble itself before him. At a solemn assembly he caused the banners of fifty-two of the trades of Ghent to be brought to him at the foot of his throne, and his secretary cancelled the charter of the renewal of the magistracy in the presence of their delegates.

The two chief privileged orders, the clergy and the nobility, rallied more easily than the commons, or urban class, to the monarchical régime. The sovereigns lavished on them honours and favour. They peopled the bishoprics and abbeys with their dependants, and granted to the most devoted of the nobles the chief military commands and the government of provinces. In 1430 Philip the Good grouped round himself those who had distinguished themselves by the extent of their services or could, by their rank, contribute to the prestige of his house, by instituting the Order of the Golden Fleece. He reserved for himself the mastership of it and nominated the first members, who were to be 'gentlemen without reproach'. They swore to the duke that they would bear to him 'good and true love'. They pledged themselves to 'honour and exalt the noble order of knighthood', and to work 'for the reverence of God and the upholding of the Christian faith'. There was thus created a national chivalry which in a measure replaced the decayed chivalry of the Middle Ages. The nobility in general showed great loyalty; there were few such cases of treason as that of the Croy family, or of desertion as that of Philip de Commines. Even more than the clergy, the nobles assisted to produce the political unification of the Burgundian state and to confirm the cohesion of the Belgian principalities by subordinating them to the central power.

But the nobles gradually realized their strength and became ultimately hostile to foreign absolutism. Hugh de Lannoy even produced a scheme of dual government, in which the States would have acted as a counterpoise to the power of the prince by having the right to intervene both in the imposition of taxes and in the management of policy in general, such as questions of war and peace.

The catastrophe of Nancy provoked a formidable reaction against the Burgundian 'innovations'. The great towns gained



the ascendancy and extorted from Mary of Burgundy the Great Privilege (1477), which broke up the state by re-establishing all the provincial autonomies, urban, corporate, and others.

Maximilian vainly attempted to imitate the uncompromising attitude of Charles the Rash. A kind of equilibrium was established between the franchises of the country and the prerogatives of the prince. Compelled to have recourse to the States-General to obtain military subsidies, the sovereigns were obliged to treat with respect the ancient privileges of each principality and of each of the three orders, and they were reduced to adopting a kind of compromise between the mediaeval tradition and the modern system of absolutism, which was in force in the great states then in process of formation (France, England, Castile).

Philip the Handsome restored the government its national character by surrounding himself with councillors who were natives of the country. Despite his Spanish tendencies Charles V did not depart from this practice, even when he organized the three collateral councils (the Privy Council, the Council of Finance, and the Council of State), offshoots of the ancient ducal council and designed to strengthen the centralization of the administration. In order to accomplish this work more easily, Charles secured from Pope Clement VI release from his oath to observe the privileges granted on the occasion of his 'Joyous Entry' in Brabant. The unpopular side of the Habsburg system was the financial; the rulers demanded many financial sacrifices from the people in order to meet the expense of purely dynastic wars.

Charles V even met with open resistance from the town of Ghent. The proud city had been half ruined owing to the decline of its cloth industry; its main source of wealth now consisted in its grain market. The corporation of the bargemen

was almost the only body to profit from this ; the other trades declined rapidly and the proletariat augmented to an alarming extent. At the time of the invasion of Artois by the army of Francis I, the city of Ghent refused the money aid which was demanded, offering assistance in the shape of the local militia. Charles V vigorously reproached the town magistrates, writing : ' We hoped that you, more than any others, would have helped us, since we, ourselves, are a native of Ghent and were born in our town of Ghent.' But the city maintained its refusal, and even attempted to prevent the agents of the treasury from collecting the necessary contributions to the aid from the inhabitants of the rural districts in the area of which Ghent was the chief place. Moreover, the town magistracy was overruled by the members of the trade associations, who took up arms and seized the town hall. They regarded the former sheriffs as responsible for the prevailing economic distress ; they suspected them of connivance with the government. They sent to the scaffold the senior sheriff, Lievin Pyn, aged seventy-five, who was falsely accused of having handed over to the government charters deposited in the ' secret ', or archive, room of the town.

The demagoguery of Ghent then appealed to Francis I against the emperor, but the King of France, far from answering them, informed Charles V of their proposals to him and facilitated the repression of the rising by allowing Charles to pass through France. The emperor surrounded the exemplary punishment which he inflicted on the town with all the forms of justice. He referred the case to the Grand Council of Malines, which declared the city guilty of rebellion and of *lèse-majesté*, and on this ground condemned it to the loss of all its privileges and to an enormous fine. The judgement further ordered that Roland, the great bell in the belfry, should be ' unhung ', that the city should assist in the construction of a fortress to

hold it in check, and, finally, that its burghers should, in a solemn ceremonial, implore mercy. This humiliating ceremony took place on May 3, 1540; a number of citizens of Ghent, some of them 'with ropes round their necks', knelt before the sovereign. By the 'Caroline Concession', Charles V abolished for all time the Ghentish constitution by suppressing the autonomous groups into which the population was divided. The emperor himself, with the Duke of Alva, climbed the tower of Saint-John (now Saint-Bavon) in order to discover the most suitable spot for the construction of the projected fortress, and he decided in favour of the site of the abbey of Saint-Bavon. He ordered the demolition of this abbey, and himself laid the foundation stone of that which the people of Ghent called 'the Castle of the Spaniards'. During the same period, he carried out a series of executions, in order to terrorize the people. He was particularly anxious to forestall fresh attacks on his sovereignty. Mary of Hungary, the regent, had warned him that the point in question was whether 'his Majesty would be master or servant'. He had not only brought low the city of the Arteveldes, he had humiliated it.

From that time Ghent was forced to contribute, like the rest of the Low Countries, towards furnishing the emperor with the greater part of his military budget and towards defraying the expense of the costly expeditions which he made in Germany, France, and Africa. The loyalty of the Belgian provinces remained unshaken during the reign of Charles V, but alarming symptoms of disaffection became evident after his abdication (1555), that is, when the Burgundian régime was ended by the accession of a prince who was an absolute stranger to the country and incapable of understanding its desires and its needs.

Save from the towns, the monarchical policy of Charles V met with little resistance. The independence of the clergy

had been already greatly reduced under the dukes of Burgundy, and the order now lost almost all its privileges. Charles V, who posed as the defender of the Church, required complete submission from the clergy, the abandonment of their financial and juridical immunities; he further secured from Leo X and Clement VII the right of nominating to vacant benefices in the Low Countries. Almost all the bishops were his creatures and consequently supported his schemes. Briefs and bulls sent from Rome were not valid in the Netherlands until they had received the royal approval in writing. Charles V reformed public charity (1531) by taking from the clergy their former monopoly in this respect. The only opposition which the government encountered on occasion from the Church came solely from the 'prelates', the abbots of the chief abbeys, who had the right of sitting in the States in several provinces. Finally, the nobility was entirely devoted to the Crown and resumed the authority which it had lost since the twelfth century; unlike the old feudal caste, of which there remained only some representatives in the wild region of the Ardennes, the nobles were created and enriched by their loyal service. Side by side with the native families of Lalaing, Ligne, Berghes, Egmont, Arenberg, were found the descendants of Burgundians or Picards, who had come in with the dukes of Burgundy, the families of Meghem, Glymes, Croy, or German counts who had followed Maximilian, such as those of Nassau. In return for their military and financial services, they secured either the governorships of provinces or the erection of some of their lands into principalities, duchies, counties, or marquisates, or the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece, the highest mark of princely appreciation, which carried with it important privileges, as, after 1517, the right of being tried only by members of the order. But all this nobility remained essentially national and in a measure preserved its 'Bur-



gundian' character, when the prince sacrificed the interests of the country to his dynastic policy. It appeared as the bulwark of the autonomy of the Low Countries against Spanish penetration under Charles V, and it enjoyed great popularity. The Sabre of Burgundy, which appeared on the collars of the Golden Fleece, became a national emblem. It figures among the ornaments of a number of buildings, and was found much later on the medals struck by the 'Beggars'.

Despite the Spanish tendencies of Charles V, the Low Countries retained the essentially national administration which had been given to them by Philip the Handsome. The officials were all drawn from the native population; such were magistrates, as Wielant, Damhouder, and Viglius; and controllers such as Thomas Gramaye, who were distinguished for their talents and activity. Without breaking with tradition, they favoured State intervention in social life, assisting to fight or to prevent the abuses of the age. They contributed to reform public charity by supporting the edict of 1531, which gave it a secular character; they repressed excessive speculation and forbade gambling on the Bourse. They were unable, however, to render effective the provision of the edict of 1531, which limited to a single day the *kermesses* of the country, in order to avoid the riots and murders for which those fêtes gave occasion. They were hardly more successful in the application of another article of this edict, which ordered the codification by the privy council of the innumerable customs of the provinces. At the end of the reign of Charles V, ten 'customs' only had been published.

### *iii. Economic Movement and Social Changes*

Until the great wars of Charles the Rash and of Charles V, the Low Countries enjoyed real economic prosperity. The princes interested themselves in developing it, knowing well

that it was the source of their power. They protected industry and the cloth trade against English competition, favoured the extension of commercial relations, especially with England, saw to the establishment of good money, and encouraged the development of the port of Antwerp and other commercial centres. In 1470 Charles the Rash undertook the dredging of the Zwyn in order to prevent the decline of Bruges. It was in the fifteenth century that this town attained its greatest splendour. Its market presented extraordinary activity. The great Italian banks had important branches there, and the colony of foreign merchants included not only Italians, but also Spaniards and Portuguese, Bretons and Osterlings—that is, members of the Hanseatic League. Merchant vessels, small and large, bore thither the produce of the south—oranges, pomegranates, lemons, attar of roses, Eastern carpets, Spanish wool, &c.—while the ships of Hamburg and of other Hanseatic towns supplied furs, corn, and metals.

The Osterlings, weakened by wars against the Danes and Dutch, and by English competition, were the first to cease frequenting the port of Bruges, and by the end of the fifteenth century that town had lost almost all its trade. The silting up of the Zwyn separated the town from the sea, although it still remained for some time the chief financial centre of the Low Countries. Antwerp took its place, attracting to itself the trade of Bruges, with the greater ease owing to the fact that its communications with the sea were improved at the beginning of the fifteenth century by the enlargement of the western Scheldt. Prior to this time, ships had only been able to proceed from the sea to Antwerp by means of the eastern Scheldt, a route which was indirect, since it involved the circumnavigation of the island of Walcheren. The Osterlings and the English founded the fortune of Antwerp, which became the great market for English cloth. The Brabançon and

Flemish towns vainly attempted to prevent the importation of English goods ; the prohibitive edicts which they secured from the dukes remained practically a dead letter. The market of Antwerp, moreover, was especially benefited by the changes which the Great Discoveries brought about in the economic life of Europe. The centre of world commerce shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and Antwerp thus became the great international market. Upon it converged the great oceanic and continental trade routes. The merchant fleets of Spain and Portugal bore thither valuable cargoes of colonial produce and a mass of the products of the south.

The market of Antwerp further became the point of interchange for the tapestries of Brussels and Oudenarde, the silk, worsted, and serges of Armentières, Hondschoote, Valenciennes, and Tournai, the cloths of Flanders, the iron of Hainault and Namur, and the weapons of Liège ; even the works of the national artists found a large number of purchasers at Antwerp. By degrees, the city replaced Bruges as a European bank. The financiers of Ulm and Augsburg had branches there from the beginning of the fifteenth century. As early as 1460 an exchange was founded at Antwerp, the first which existed in Europe. It was to Antwerp that the Merchant Adventurers directed their vessels when they had been driven from the Zwyn by the protectionist policy of the citizens of Bruges. They brought there especially the products of the English weaving industry, the prosperity of which was constantly growing. To such an extent did the prosperity of the port of Antwerp increase that by the middle of the sixteenth century its population exceeded a hundred thousand ; it was the first European port to reach so high a figure.

The fifteenth century was marked by the occurrence of a great change not only in the commerce of the Low Countries, but

also in their industry. The competition of the English cloth-makers proved fatal to many towns; Louvain and Ypres saw the emigration of their labouring population, and, owing to their corporate system, which was based on a number of hampering regulations, they were unable to recover their prosperity. The old cloth industry still languished in a few of its ancient centres; it took refuge in the more rural districts where labour was plentiful (Armentières, Hondschoote, Warneton, Tourcoing, Poperinghe, Verviers). A new form of cloth industry, the making of light fabrics at a low price, developed with good results, serges and worsteds being produced in place of the finer types of cloth, which were specialities of the English producers. Many towns owed a return of prosperity to the new cloth industries which established themselves there. The making of tapestry, those marvellous 'frescoes of the North', was established and flourished at Arras, Tournai, Oudenarde, and Brussels, among other places, while lace-making employed a number of workers drawn from the poorest classes. The central power favoured, among other industries, that of tapestry-making, for which it created a new regulation, the tendency of which was to bring the wholesale trade under its control, as the towns had done in the Middle Ages, each branch of the industry being kept distinct. An edict of 1544 inaugurated the Mercantile System which favoured the foundation of large manufactures.

Thanks to abundance of capital, the resources of the Ardennes, in the shape of water-power and timber, were more largely exploited. Smelting works increased in this district, which Guicciardini compared to the 'shops and blazing forges of Vulcan'. The collieries of the district of Liège increased their output to supply the needs of the metal industry. Coal, up to the sixteenth century, had only been used by blacksmiths and the poor. In the following century its employment



became more general, and the Meuse and its tributaries made its transport easy. The wealth in iron, possessed by the neighbouring districts, enabled the smiths of Liège to compete successfully with their rivals. In the sixteenth century they inaugurated a new industry, that of firearms, and musket-making became the chief industry of the city of Liège. Collieries increased around the old Walloon city, near which sheltered or gathered round it a crowd of miners and musket-makers.

Bold *entrepreneurs* further established in the Low Countries a number of new industries. At Antwerp, Plantin, a native of Touraine, established his famous printing works in 1550; the art of cutting diamonds was introduced, as well as the manufacture of glass resembling Venetian glass.

Economic activity was still further intensified by the improvement of means of communication. The post, the use of which had been confined to government carriers, was allowed to carry merchants' letters, and a service of public carriers was organized. The canal of Willebroek, completed in 1560, joined Brussels with the Rupel and the Scheldt; in the same way, the Terneuzen Canal in the following year united Ghent with the sea.

Agriculture and the industries dependent on it profited from the almost total abolition of serfdom (except in the Ardennes, where the rural nobility maintained feudal traditions) and from the fairer assessment of taxation. The area of cultivated land was further increased by reclaiming marshland by means of dikes and by further disafforestation which proceeded, for example, in Luxemburg. Methods of cultivation improved, especially in Flanders, where, despite the poor soil, the yield of the crops excited the admiration of foreigners. In the sixteenth century this district was termed the garden of Europe. The corn trade was the great source of wealth in certain towns, such as Ghent and Douai, which were con-

nected with the sea by a navigable river. As Flanders partly depended for its food supply on foreign sources, war produced scarcity in Flanders and even frequent famines there.

All these commercial and industrial changes did not occur without shocks or difficulties. If they gave birth to a class of *nouveaux riches*, the modern *bourgeoisie*, they, at the same time, vastly increased the numbers of the wage-earning class. There arose a crowd of new wage-earners, those employed in manufacturing industries, who produced articles not made by the old trade associations and who were, consequently, in a peculiarly precarious situation. Excluded from membership of the corporations, they were isolated and at the mercy of their capitalist employer or his agents. Possessing no resources, they were, at times of economic crisis, often reduced to beggary or vagabondage.

Up to this time, begging, the scourge of the later Middle Ages, had hardly met with any opposition. It was rather encouraged by private charity; a number of able-bodied men lived in idleness owing to the fact that their subsistence was assured by charitable institutions, which were very numerous. The cities took the initiative in bringing about a reform of the granting of relief, while, for reasons of police, the government endeavoured to reduce the number of mendicants by threatening them with the punishment of the pillory or of flogging. As early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, the town magistrates centralized charitable institutions, established committees for the inspection of the poor, and took measures to ensure that the children who were supported by charity should be apprenticed to some trade. Such measures were first adopted by the magistracy of Ypres, which, in 1525, drew up a series of regulations inspired by the ideas of the great humanist, Louis Vivès. In 1531 an edict imposed

the most important of these regulations on all the towns of the Low Countries.

From the end of the fourteenth century until 1480 the population almost continually increased. About the middle of the fifteenth century the Burgundian possessions in the Low Countries contained some two million inhabitants, an exceptional number for the period. In the last twenty years of the fifteenth century, population was reduced as a result of the numerous wars and of the damage caused by them, but it began to increase again with the opening of the following century, until, in 1550, it amounted to some three millions. The birth-rate was very high, but the death-rate was equally so as a result of epidemics and of defective sanitation; the poor, who comprised a quarter of the population, were ill fed, ill housed, and, above all, ill clad.

*iv. Artistic and Intellectual Flowering-time*

The period which extends from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth was one of the richest and most brilliant in the history of the Belgian states from the point of view of civilization in general. It marks the culminating point of their share in the history of art and the movement of ideas in Europe. Among its distinctive characteristics is the number of intellectual and artistic centres, the result of the prosperity of so many towns and of the vigorous municipal spirit which persisted, despite the progress of monarchical power. The court of Burgundy, on its side, contributed further to heighten the brilliancy of this civilization and favour its spread, since it was anxious to rival royal courts, not only in chivalrous exploits but also in magnificence and liberality.

The progress of luxury was the primary cause of an artistic revival. It is the architecture of the Burgundian period which

best expresses its exuberant vitality and splendid energy. The architecture is really overpowered by the sculpture, which itself displayed astonishing originality and wealth. Buildings were overladen with ornaments and statues, yet without losing their elegance and harmony. The town halls of the period assumed the aspect of real palaces, and lost almost all resemblance to the imposing halls and proud towers from which they were derived. The town hall of Brussels and that of Louvain, built during the first half of the fifteenth century, were the first of the sumptuous edifices which were the pride of so many Belgian cities (Mons, Damme, Alost, Ghent, Oudenarde, &c.). Some of the wealthy burghers built themselves splendid private houses, such as that of Gruuthuse at Bruges. The churches also display an unheard-of magnificence and denote an extraordinary boldness of conception. At Antwerp, Ghent, Malines, Louvain, and Mons, churches of magnificent proportions were built, decorated with stone tracery and with façades designed to be completed by towers of extraordinary height which could never be finished according to their original plan.

The internal decoration of the buildings corresponded with their rich exterior; painters, sculptors, and goldsmiths completed the work of the architects, who themselves often practised many of the arts. Among the crowd of artists the 'image-maker', Claus Sluter, of Dutch origin, was pre-eminent; the sculptures with which he decorated the gateway of the Chartreux and the Puits des Prophètes at Dijon marked a decisive breach with all convention and, by their imitation of nature, prepared that realistic evolution which led from Gothic to Renaissance art. His contemporary, Melchior Broederlam, at the request of Philip the Bold, painted for the Chartreuse at Dijon the first pictures which made famous the artistic school of the Low Countries. That school soon affirmed its really



national character, and was distinguished by its scrupulous observance of nature and its power of expression. The Flemings, Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, and the Walloon, Roger de la Pasture, impressed on their creations an intensity of life and a poetic fervour which were incomparable. Many painters were attached to the ducal court, such as Jan Van Eyck, who was frequently employed on delicate missions. Others were official portrait-painters to important towns. Thus, Roger de la Pasture left Tournai, his native town, to take up, under the name of Van der Weyden, the position of official painter of the city of Brussels. Memling of Maintz settled at Bruges and in his turn attained eminent rank by drawing his inspiration from the new forms of art which he discovered there. The decline of Bruges was an advantage to Antwerp, which, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, became the artistic capital of the Low Countries. It was there that a school of painting arose which, aiming at the humanization of art, expressed profane emotions as well as the religious sentiment. Quentin Metsys, who was born at Louvain, was the most noteworthy representative of this school. He succeeded in uniting a typically southern grace to his native qualities—firmness of colouring and exact observation of nature. His portraits are indeed strikingly lifelike. Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England, whose portrait he painted, could say with justice that his works would be imperishable, ‘if horrid Mars did not triumph over Minerva’.

Admiration for the art of Raphael and Michelangelo, favoured by the spread of humanism, attracted very many artists to Italy. Jean Gossart of Maubeuge (died 1541) there adopted the subjects and the style of the Southern Renaissance. Bernard Van Orley (died 1542) imitated the form, the theatrical postures, and the magnificent settings of the South, his pupils

Michael Coxie, 'the Flemish Raphael' (1499-1592), and Peter Coucke of Alost (died 1550) went beyond him in the imitation of the Italian masters. From this time painting ceased to be workmanlike, as it had been in the Middle Ages; it tended to become cultivated; this fact appears in the mass of savants and littérateurs, such as Lambert Lombart of Liège (1505-66), who was a painter of the Roman school, and the famous Frans Floris or de Vriendt (died 1570) at Antwerp, who enjoyed a European reputation and had a number of pupils.

Antwerp became a veritable factory of Italian paintings. Breughel was almost the sole representative of truly Flemish art, and he did not enjoy the same vogue as his colleagues, who rivalled the epic art of Michelangelo in Italy, and who have settled in Spain,<sup>1</sup> France, England, and Germany.

All the plastic arts felt the influence of the Italian Renaissance. Following on this strictly individual and rich creation of the architects of the first half of the sixteenth century,<sup>2</sup> Corneille Floris or de Vriendt drew inspiration from the *Palazzi* of Rome, as, for instance, in the case of the town hall of Antwerp, which was built in 1561. Jacques Dubroeucq of Mons was both an architect and a sculptor; he built in the same style the sumptuous palaces of Mary of Hungary at Binche and Mariemont. The sculptors went farther than the architects in this imitation of the Italian style by adding to the Gothic buildings of the first half of the sixteenth century

<sup>1</sup> Peter de Kempeneere, or Pedro Campaña, founded the school of Seville.

<sup>2</sup> The Bourse at Antwerp (1531); the town hall at Ghent (1518-35) and the watermen's house (1531); at Brussels, the Broodhuis (about 1525); at Bruges, the chapel of the Holy Blood (1529-33) and the façade of the Hôtel du Franc (1520); at Oudenarde, the town hall (1515-35); at Liège, the episcopal palace (1526-33) and the church of Saint James (1538), to the nave of which was early added a beautiful porch of the Renaissance style.

decorations and adornments in the Renaissance manner. Their best works are the doorway of the sheriff's hall at the town hall of Oudenarde (1531-4) and the magnificent chimney of the Hôtel du Franc at Bruges (1529-42). They still preserved, however, some national characteristics. But in the productions of Jacques Dubroeucq (died 1584) the Italian Renaissance definitely triumphed. In the matter of their models the sculptors were more independent than the painters; they were no servile copyists. Side by side with the masterpieces of Dubroeucq, which are distinguished by their simplicity and strength, the works of Corneille Floris or de Vriendt of Antwerp (1518-75), of John de Bologne of Douai (1524-1608), who spent almost his whole life in Italy, and of Alexander Colyns of Malines (1526/29-1612), mark an epoch in the history of sculpture.

Literature and music also reflected the extraordinary vitality and the complex aspirations of the age. The yearly festivals and commemorations of famous exploits were enhanced by musical and dramatic performances, which were derived from religious ceremonies. The Fleming, John Ockeghem (died 1494-6), and Josquin-des Prés, of Hainault (died 1521), founded the reputation of that school of music which reached its zenith with Orlandus Lassus in the second half of the sixteenth century. A number of dramatic writers strove to vary the representations of the mysteries by including in them comic pieces (*farces* and *esbatements*) or by adding to them 'moralities', intended for the instruction of the public. Associated in chambers of rhetoric, they organized competitions or *landjuweelen*, which gave rise to those magnificent and picturesque pageants or cavalcades which were real *tableaux vivants* in their character.

The court of Burgundy was the marvel of its time, not only on account of the *largesse* which it showered upon artists, but

also on account of its refined culture, its real courtesy. Its historians, such as Monstrelet (died 1450) and Chastellain (died 1475), undertook the task of celebrating it, but a surer title to fame was supplied by the library created by the dukes of Burgundy, 'the richest and noblest library in the world', which is now the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. In the time of Philip the Good, it contained 18,000 volumes, mainly consisting of the romances of chivalry of the cycles of Alexander, Charlemagne, and Arthur; accounts of travel in the East, such as that of Marco Polo, were also found there in large numbers, an indication of the interest aroused by adventurous and distant journeys. The dukes of Burgundy further assisted the spread of knowledge by collaborating in the foundation and development of a national university at Louvain.

Established in the chief town of Brabant, which was situated in the diocese of Liège, this university (or *studium generale*, as it was then described) was the product of co-operation between ducal power, in the person of John IV, ecclesiastical authority, represented by the chapter of the church of Saint-Peter at Louvain, and communal authority, that is, the magistracy of the town. The duke, in conjunction with the chapter and magistracy of Louvain, solicited and secured from Pope Martin V authority to establish this foundation (1425), which at first did not contain a faculty of theology, since the pope was not prepared to deprive the University of Paris of the care of the future theologians of the Belgian provinces. There could be no better indication of the importance of the urban element in Belgian national life than the part taken by the commune of Louvain in the foundation of this centre of higher education within its walls. It is instructive to compare the origin of this university with that of the University of Dole, which was born about the same time (1421). In its organization the Duke of Burgundy and



the Archbishop of Besançon alone took part. The University of Louvain preserved its triple character down to the time of its suppression at the end of the eighteenth century. Originally intended for the training of clerks (masters of arts), jurists, and doctors, it was authorized by Pope Eugenius IV to add a faculty of theology (1432). Alike from the ecclesiastical and from the political point of view, this institution tended to unify the Belgian provinces. Future prelates and legists were no longer compelled to pursue their studies at Paris, at Cologne, or in some other foreign university.

The University of Louvain assisted to form that aristocracy of intelligence which, in the course of the fifteenth century, grew up beside the aristocracy of wealth and the aristocracy of birth. Among the creators of this new class there figured also the Brothers of the Common Life, who continued to spread literary and scientific culture in the ranks of the laity. They trained pupils such as Thierry Martens, the celebrated printer of Alost, and Erasmus, the greatest of the humanists.

Though essentially aristocratic, in the sense that it used a language, Latin, which separated it from the people, humanism exercised a profound influence on society. It aspired to effect a reformation of society on more rational and more scientific lines. Erasmus wished 'to bring the wisdom of the ancients within the reach of his contemporaries, to place the experience of the past at the service of the present or the future'. The revival of learning was, in his eyes, only a means for effecting social regeneration. He sought to humanize everything, politics, religion, morality. In order to realize his ideal, he wished to instruct and to enlighten the governing classes, who, in their turn, were to educate the rest. His *Adagia* (1500), in which he summarized the wisdom of antiquity, had a prodigious success, as did also his *Praise of Folly* and his *Colloquia*. In them he employed all the resources

of his biting and sarcastic wit to combat mediaeval tradition. He declared himself against asceticism, against scholasticism, against superstitious practices ; he condemned the celibacy of the clergy ; he saw in religious worship nothing but pure symbolism ; he affirmed the superiority of life in the world over life in a cloister. The essential principles of his proposed reform were the free development of individuality, so that the individual might be able to play a useful part in the world. In the application of these principles he even declared himself in favour of the abolition of class distinctions and the suppression of frontiers. His writings excited real enthusiasm, but he early came into conflict with the theologians, through seeking to impose upon them historical and philological criticism of the Bible. The quarrel broke out over the foundation, at Louvain, of the College of the Three Languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) (1517). The university opposed this school, for fear that it would become a centre of heresy. Attacked by the Dominicans and by the Carmelites, who discovered heretical doctrines in his works, Erasmus left the university city and took refuge at Basle. The hostility of the theologians of Louvain towards him only ceased when Clement VII imposed silence on them. As for the College of the Three Languages, it continued, but with the loss of its original character, being confined to the study of philology. The ideas of Erasmus, however, were not entirely stifled in the Netherlands ; the spirit of humanism and tolerance continued to spread and thus favoured indirectly the progress of heresy.

From that period the humanists of the Low Countries were almost all orthodox, and although still contributing to the progress of learning, they ceased to play a part in social progress. Classical learning and the sciences flourished ; side by side with the philologists, such as Clénard and Dorpius, appeared the botanists, Dodoens and de l'Escluse, the

geographer, Mercator, and the great anatomist, Andreas Vesalius.

After 1530 the intellectual movement was directed mainly towards religious questions. The Low Countries experienced more strongly than the other districts of Europe the effects of the Reformation. The upper classes were better prepared for it as a result of the teaching of the humanists, and the mass of the people, severely tried by the economic crises of the period, aspired more ardently to the amelioration of their lot. Tendencies hostile to the Church appeared also in the middle class: the chambers of rhetoric in their *zinnespelen* (moralities) showed often a spirit so hostile to ecclesiastical authority that the government eventually submitted their productions to censorship, and the Duke of Alva later prohibited their representation. But the literature of the rhetoricians also supplied the most popular work devoted to the defence of the Church, the *Refereynen* of Anna Bijns (1528), a production full of vigour and lively passion, in which there are attributed to Luther all the ills from which his age suffered, pestilence, war, unbridled luxury, and licentious manners.

At the close of the fifteenth century numerous abuses had weakened the prestige of the Church in the Low Countries as in the rest of Europe; most of the bishops led completely secular and worldly lives and delegated their duties to vicars or suffragans, recruited from among the monks whom, like the humanists, they affected to despise. Court favourites accumulated a number of dignities (abbacies, canonries, provostships) to the detriment of ecclesiastical administration and ecclesiastical discipline. The abbeys were in a state of decadence; nunneries ceased to observe the rules of seclusion. The lower clergy, who were in general ignorant and whose morals were not very edifying, further contributed to bring the Church into disrepute. Nominated by negligent abbots or by self-

seeking nobles, the greater part of the *curés* were incapable of discharging the duties of their ministry. Among them were to be found adventurers and outcasts. So their rapacity was boundless, and owing to the immunities and privileges of the clergy in general it was difficult to repress it.

The hostility of the public towards religious franchises manifested itself on many occasions ; from the end of the fifteenth century, chroniclers declared the presence of ecclesiastics in the government an intolerable abuse, for ' God had not destined them for that '. The central power, on its side, took measures to restrain ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and during the reign of Charles V diminished the influence of the clergy on society by secularizing the organization of charities (1531). At the same time the Church to some extent lost her control over education, which became half secular under the influence of the Brothers of the Common Life.

Without wishing to break with Catholicism, Erasmus damaged it by the raillery and sarcasm directed against the monks, the worship of relics, and the celibacy of the clergy. His attempts to revive the life of the Church by means of ' good learning ' and to rejuvenate Catholicism by the spread of knowledge failed, although his ideas were shared even by popes and cardinals. At all events the religious spirit either emancipated itself or grew weak ; on the one hand individual mysticism developed, on the other indifference, and the masses of the people lost confidence in the clergy, and eventually in the Church herself.

The first symptoms of the Reformation appeared at Antwerp in 1518, a few months after Luther had nailed up his theses at Wittenberg. Lutheran books spread rapidly in this city, where there was a very large German colony. The Augustinians, in conjunction with their German brothers, preached the doctrines of Luther publicly and obtained enormous



success. At first the government failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation. The regent, Margaret of Austria, imbued with humanist ideas, was rather inclined to sympathize with the reformers, but soon she was obliged to adopt a different attitude owing to the breach between the pope and Luther and the condemnation of the latter by the emperor.

Charles V, in accord with the papal legate, adopted rigorous measures in order to extirpate heresy in the Burgundian provinces. The magistrates were obliged to deprive the adherents of Luther of their official positions and to punish with death, as well as confiscation, not only those disciples but also any one who, without the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities, printed books dealing with religion. Everywhere Lutheran writings were burned and the episcopal inquisition proceeded with great severity against the heretics. Nevertheless, the new doctrines continued to spread. Charles V then organized a repressive system modelled as closely as possible upon the Spanish Holy Office, and established a real State Inquisition. Pope Adrian VI, however, was unwilling to abandon his rights and himself nominated the Inquisitor-General. That officer prosecuted two Augustinians of Antwerp, who were burnt at the stake and were the proto-martyrs of the Reformation (1523).

From this time, the new religion was only practised in secret. To destroy it the emperor redoubled his severity. The death penalty was threatened against all who, without being theologians, should discuss religion; against all who made and distributed pictures insulting God, the Virgin, or the saints; against all who, knowing heretics, failed to denounce them. This ferocious legislation, intended to supplement the Inquisition, struck terror into the country; it checked the spread of Lutheranism, but the dispersion of the Lutheran congregations secured adherents for new and far more radical sects, which

soon appeared in the Belgian provinces. The doctrines of the Anabaptists, who announced the approaching end of the world and the coming of the reign of Christ, made a special appeal to the masses of the people, who made ready to overthrow Church and State in order to establish a new world, the heavenly city, founded upon liberty and justice, love and charity. Owing to their revolutionary character, these subverters of the social order, who made proselytes especially in the industrial areas, met with opposition from Catholics and Lutherans alike.

By new proclamations the government endeavoured to reach the secret press, books from which circulated under the cover of anonymity, disguised titles, and forged ecclesiastical imprimaturs. Charles V established a closer accord between the efforts of the Church and State. The union of these two authorities was definitely regulated by a proclamation of 1550, which confirmed the penalties announced in previous edicts and required a certificate of Catholicism from every one settling in the country, and, at the same time, assimilated the inquisitors to State functionaries and ordered all public officials to assist them by every means in their power. As a result of a protest by the city of Antwerp, the emperor dispensed with the certificate of orthodoxy in the case of foreign merchants and exempted the great commercial city from the direct control of his agents. The spread of heresy was undoubtedly retarded by this régime of terror. But about 1543 a new and more dangerous doctrine effected its entry into the Low Countries; Calvinism, which claimed to reform the State and to subordinate it entirely to the Church, assumed from the beginning a revolutionary character. Its radicalism early enabled it to absorb in those provinces the other Protestant confessions. Calvinism really involved the subordination of lay to ecclesiastical authority by its claim to bring the State under divine

law, and its followers devoted themselves body and soul to the will of God and the triumph of His Church. Submitting to a rigorous discipline, they exercised a profound influence and soon undertook the leadership of the struggle against the 'tyrant who opposes the Word of God'.

Their 'pastors', who had received an excellent training at Strasbourg, Lausanne, or Geneva, entered the towns in disguise or under assumed names and preached at night, behind locked doors, in small inns, or in some lonely spot. Even earlier than 1543 they had made converts in the suburbs of Lille and Tournai. In 1545 the pastor of Tournai, Peter Brully, was arrested and executed. But Calvinism gradually won Valenciennes and Hainault and, afterwards, the northern provinces—especially the ports of Holland and Zealand, thanks to the intimate relations which existed between them and England. That country soon harboured a large number of 'refugees', Walloon and Flemish Calvinists, who introduced their industries into London, Sandwich, Colchester, and Norwich; while they also established centres of propaganda. Antwerp, at the same time, was a hotbed of Calvinism and served to some extent as a rallying-point for the Flemish and Walloon congregations.

## *The Revolt against Spanish Rule (1555-98)*

### *i. The Reforms of Philip II and the Opposition to Granvelle*

THE accession of Philip II makes a tragic moment in the history of the Belgian provinces. It occurred in solemn circumstances, the solemnity of which is increased if all the sad era which they inaugurated be considered. On October 26, 1555, before the assembled States-General, Charles V publicly handed over his authority to his son. In the farewell address which he delivered to the delegates of the provinces the emperor recalled the affection which they had constantly displayed towards him and exhorted them to maintain their unity, to defend the right, and to combat heresy. He was unable to master his emotion when he reached the point of declaring it to be his duty to part for ever from such devoted vassals, and the audience was deeply moved, although it was noted with displeasure that Charles addressed his son in Spanish, that Philip's few words were spoken in the same tongue, and that it was a native of Franche-Comté, Granvelle, Bishop of Arras, who spoke on behalf of the new ruler. Ostensibly Philip's accession effected no change in the government of the Netherlands. He swore to observe faithfully the privileges of the various provinces and confirmed all officials in their charges. If he caused Granvelle to enter the Council of State, he was careful to summon to it also the young nobles whom his father had indicated to him, among whom were the Prince of Orange and Count Egmont. As a matter of fact, he really revolutionized the political system by perverting the machinery



of existing institutions, and, from the very first, he devoted himself to a reform of the government in an absolutist sense. According to his view, every one should bend before his will.

Even while he was still resident at Brussels, he displayed his great distrust for the higher nobility and hardly consulted any one outside his Castilian retinue. Orange and Egmont soon realized that their admission to the Council of State was only a matter of form. Philip caused the proclamations against heretics to be rigorously enforced and authorized the Society of Jesus to establish communities in the Low Countries, without consulting even the most orthodox of his Belgian advisers. His sole aim was the restoration of religious unity by the extermination of those who threatened at once the Catholic faith and the majesty of the Crown. He made himself peculiarly unpopular by maintaining in the country a large number of Spanish soldiers, whose pride and insolence caused them to be as much hated as they were feared for their courage. It is true that he made use of them in 1557 in the campaign which he undertook against France, but this new war caused lively discontent in the Belgian provinces owing to the exactions to which it gave rise. They showed themselves recalcitrant, being unwilling to bear the burden of a war which did not concern them.

In the very year of the victory of Saint-Quentin (1557), gained by Egmont, Philip II found himself on the verge of bankruptcy, and was compelled to require further sacrifices. The States-General boldly formulated their complaints and showed a wish to see the custody of fortresses committed to the nobles of the land and to have two-thirds of the army composed of native troops. Two years later, they demanded from Philip II, at the moment of his departure for Spain, the dismissal of the foreign soldiery who remained in the country, despite the conclusion of peace with France, and the conduct of the government by natives. The king, who was

offended at these demands, promised to recall the Spanish troops, but delayed to do so.

The absence of the sovereign caused the changes which he had surreptitiously introduced into the political organization of the country to appear more clearly. Philip had instructed the regent, Margaret of Parma, to have recourse on all important matters to the advice of a *consulta* of three members, Granvelle, Bishop of Arras, Viglius, and Berlaimont, all of whom were servilely devoted to the Crown. In reality, Granvelle directed the whole administration under the inspiration of Philip II. A native of Franche-Comté, he had no real fatherland; his fidelity to the king took with him the place of patriotism. Insatiable in his love of offices and greedy of power, he served the cause of absolutism from principle as well as from interest; himself neither fanatical nor violent nor cruel, he obeyed blindly his master's orders. Despite his diplomatic talent, he could not conceal his dislike for the liberties of the Low Countries, and more especially for the privileges of that high nobility, the members of which despised him as a parvenu. The extraordinary luxury which he displayed, for example, in his sumptuous villa of La Fontaine, near Brussels, is further an indication of his vanity. Ere long the Prince of Orange, who was then Governor of Holland and Zealand, and the Count of Egmont, Governor of Flanders and Artois, gathered all the nobility around them in opposition to Granvelle, the instrument of the 'tyranny of the prince'. Educated, like most of the nobles of this period, by the humanists, they did not share in Philip's hatred against heretics; least of all was that hatred shared by Orange, who was himself the son of a Lutheran, although he had been educated in the Catholic religion at the court of Charles V. The nobles demanded the withdrawal of the Spanish troops, and aroused so vigorous an agitation on this question that the king eventually granted their demand

in 1561. But a new dispute, and one which was still more serious, forthwith arose on the matter of the creation of new bishoprics. In augmenting the number of bishops Philip II had chiefly in view the success of his campaign against Protestantism, but by creating at a stroke fourteen new bishoprics, whose holders were nominated by himself, with the consent of the pope, he at the same time considerably increased his personal power. Further, the method adopted for the creation of these bishoprics displeased the abbeys, which were burdened with the duty of providing for the 'episcopal table' of the new prelates. It likewise provoked criticism from the nobles, who were discontented because they were debarred from holding the new sees, Philip II having decided that their occupants must be theologians. The new bishops, summoned to attend the States, further formed there a powerful monarchical party. It was at this time, too, that Granvelle undertook the conversion of the University of Louvain into a real 'general seminary', placed under the control of the sovereign by the establishment in it of regius professors. He further created a university at Douai (1562), in order to keep in the Low Countries youths who wished to prosecute their studies in a French-speaking town.

Granvelle, loaded with favours by the king, and raised to the position of Archbishop of Malines and a cardinal, was regarded as responsible for all the mistakes which were in reality committed by Philip II. The Council of State dared to send Baron de Montigny to the king to explain the dangers of the situation, but this step was vain. Granvelle, however, lost the confidence of the regent, who imagined that the cardinal was intriguing against her with the king.

Finally, Orange, Egmont, and Hoorn sent to the king a formal complaint against the cardinal and Margaret secretly demanded his dismissal. Some weeks later Granvelle left 'on leave'; he did not return again (1564).

*ii. Disturbances with regard to Calvinism and the Compromise of the Nobles*

Far from solving the crisis, this concession only served to aggravate it. Revolutionary symptoms made their appearance, more especially in the centres of heresy, Lille, Tournai, and Valenciennes, and in the ports of Holland and Zealand, where Calvinism had made progress during the preceding twenty years. Antwerp, owing to its large foreign colony, which included a number of English merchants, became the rallying-point of all the Calvinistic congregations. Among them were included many nobles and many merchants, but the main body of the Calvinists was drawn from the poorer class, the wage-earners, who were converted to this creed in the hope of bettering their lot.

Despite the express orders of Philip II the magistrates in general did not dare to take severe measures against the thousands of Calvinists. The repression of heresy roused open resistance; at Valenciennes, the mob released two heretics who were condemned to the stake (1562). Troops sent by the regent, however, prevented preaching and dispersed the reformers, who were obliged to go into hiding or to take to flight. Repression now became everywhere more rigorous, in order to impress 'that evil beast called the people', to use Granvelle's phrase. Seeing the disasters caused by the enforcement of the proclamations, Orange, Egmont, and Hoorn advocated their more lenient application, and the majority of the Catholics shared this point of view.

The Council of State sent Count Egmont to Philip II to suggest to him not only a modification of the proclamations but also the nationalization of the government by increasing the share of the Council of State and the States-General in it. The victor of Saint-Quentin was received with a great show



of respect, but did not secure the slightest concession; the king even declared in his letters that he would rather sacrifice a hundred thousand lives than give way on the religious question.

Like the Huguenots in France, the Calvinists soon established in the Low Countries an active and energetic party under the leadership of such men as John de Marnix and his brother Philip, the bitter polemical writer who later wrote the *Tableau des différends de la religion* and the *Byencorff*. They availed themselves skilfully of the discontent aroused by the recent failure of Egmont in order to attract the majority of the opposition, the chief of whom were the nobles, both Catholic and Protestant. During the summer of the year 1565, secret conferences, held at Spa, prepared the way for the formation of a league, analogous to the confederation of the Huguenots in France, which included almost the whole nobility. The programme of the party was ably drawn up by Gilles Le Clercq, a lawyer of Tournai; it included a promise on oath to prevent the maintenance of the Inquisition, without doing anything 'which would tend to the dishonour of God and the king'. Margaret of Parma was ready to follow the advice of Granvelle, who preached the necessity of a struggle against these 'men of war' (the nobles commanded the militia bands) 'who armed themselves against the Church and justice', thus threatening the overthrow of the State. But what could she do against those who, in actual fact, controlled the armed force? She was obliged even to submit to receive a deputation from the 'noble company', who presented to her in the palace at Brussels a petition suggested by the Prince of Orange (1566). She promised to transmit this petition to the king and to 'moderate' provisionally the proclamations relating to the repression of heresy. On the evening of the day of this audience, the nobles, wearing as badges wallets and small

bowls, like the mendicants and beggars—no doubt an allusion to the misery produced in the country by the king's measures—met together at a banquet, where the cry, 'Long live the beggars!' was heard for the first time. This was the rallying cry of all the malcontents, but it was not understood in the same sense by all who used it. Some were 'political beggars' and aimed only at the abolition of the 'Spanish tyranny'; others were 'religious beggars' and were especially opposed to that which they called 'the Roman idolatry'.

The second of these two parties secured the ascendancy, and was early able to divert the revolution into a religious channel. The success of the 'Compromise' emboldened the Calvinists, who imagined that, for the future, their religion would be tolerated. Calvinistic merchants offered the funds necessary for hiring mercenaries in order that the league of nobles might oppose force to force. So irresistible was the tide of revolution that the offer was accepted.

Bands of iconoclasts suddenly appeared in the industrial districts of southern Flanders (August 1566). The churches were sacked by bands of zealous Calvinists, swollen by a mob of unemployed, who were very numerous as a result of the extreme scarcity of this year. The movement spread like a train of powder; it infected Ypres, Oudenarde, Antwerp, Ghent, and Tournai, and spread into the north of Zealand, Holland, and Friesland. These troubles broke out so suddenly that the authorities were nowhere able to check them. But a reaction followed and produced the formation among the Catholics of a party of anti-beggars. The regent presently demanded from the officials a new oath of 'absolute fealty' to the sovereign. Egmont consented to take it, but Orange and Hoorn refused. With the assistance of regiments raised in Germany the regent expelled the Calvinist pastors and established garrisons in Tournai and Valenciennes; everywhere the small

bands of armed Calvinists were exterminated. Numbers of the reformers forthwith emigrated to Friesland, the Rhine provinces, and England. Orange took refuge in his county of Nassau to await events.

The Low Countries, indeed, seemed to be pacified when the Duke of Alva, at the head of a Spanish army, arrived with the mission of avenging the outrages which had been committed against the Catholic religion (August 1567). His master had given him definite instructions 'to do all the harm that he could to the rebels'.

### *iii. The Duke of Alva and the Prince of Orange*

The Duke of Alva had long been filled with fanatic hatred, as he himself said, not only against the dissidents, but also against the people of the Low Countries, where the *bourgeoisie* enjoyed a preponderating influence. Philip II knew that this general, who was some sixty years of age, would display ruthless energy in carrying out the schemes of punishment which they had prepared together and which consisted above all in 'cutting off the heads of the conspiracy'. He knew that the reign of terror would be organized with cold determination and inflexible system. The sword and the stake would speedily overcome, he believed, the most energetic opposition.

Arriving with the title of Captain-General, the Duke of Alva soon combined with it all the powers of a governor-general. After a few days Margaret of Parma, seeing that she had played her part, handed over her functions to him. He began by the sudden arrest of Egmont and Hoorn at Brussels, and of Van Straelen, the burgomaster of Antwerp; soon afterwards, he sent orders to Spain that the same fate should be inflicted upon the unfortunate Montigny. He established an extraordinary tribunal to deal with cases connected with the rebellion. This council, which was styled the Council of

Troubles, and was christened by the people the Tribunal of Blood, merely pronounced the sentences dictated by the duke or his creatures. Wholesale executions took place at Brussels, and the duke acquired a vast fortune from the confiscation of the property of those who were condemned. At this time, also, Alva had a citadel constructed at Antwerp, which was intended to overawe the commercial metropolis; ordered the young Count of Buren, son of the Prince of Orange, to be sent prisoner to Spain, despite the protests of the University of Louvain, whose privileges were thus violated; and he also took energetic measures to check the emigration resulting from the reign of terror. He sent to the scaffold many signatories of the Compromise of the Nobles. But the event which especially struck terror into the people was the execution of Egmont and Hoorn. The Council of Troubles declared them guilty of high treason and condemned them to death, although, as members of the Order of the Golden Fleece, they were not liable to be tried except by that order. They were beheaded in the Market Square of Brussels on June 5, 1568, in the presence of a strong military force. As for Montigny, the brother of the Count of Hoorn, nothing more was heard of him; he was secretly strangled in his cell at Simancas, and this drama, carefully concealed, remained unknown until the historical discoveries of our own time.

The Prince of Orange, who had raised an army in Germany, was held in check by the skilful strategy of the Duke of Alva, who commanded superior forces much better armed and organized. Louis of Nassau, brother of Orange, after gaining a victory at Heiligerlee in Friesland, suffered a terrible defeat at Jemgum. To celebrate this success the duke caused his own statue to be set up in the citadel of Antwerp; he was depicted as taming rebellion.

By order of Philip II, he then proclaimed a general pardon,



which contained, it is true, many exceptions and was to come into force only when the whole work of vengeance was completed. He then devoted himself to a task which he confessed to be extraordinarily difficult—the suppression, as he put it, of ‘customs rooted in a people as free as this one has always been’. He wished to make everything Spanish, and especially to introduce the system of taxation which prevailed in Spain: the hundredth penny on all property, personal and real; the twentieth on the sale of real property, and the tenth on the sale of personal property. He thus burdened the Belgians with heavy charges intended to pay the army which held them under the yoke. Industry and commerce soon completely ceased; merchants emigrated and work generally stopped in the industrial districts. The levy of the tenth met with an obstinate resistance, which in turn produced forced sales and military executions, followed by heart-rending scenes in many towns in the poorer quarters.

News suddenly came (April 1, 1572) of the capture of Brill by the Sea Beggars, who had for some time found an asylum in England, and this blow was the prelude to a general rising in the north. A crowd of refugees returned and the Prince of Orange availed himself of the naval inferiority of the Spaniards to support the Sea Beggars, who soon became masters of the river mouths. The capture of Flushing, amongst other places, gave them the key of Antwerp. In the south of the country Mons was surprised by Louis of Nassau, and many towns in Brabant and Flanders fell into the hands of the Prince of Orange. Disconcerted by the success of the rebels, the Duke of Alva could only recover Mons after a four months’ siege, that is, after the massacre of Saint Bartholomew (August 24, 1572), which deprived the insurgents in the Low Countries of the help of the Huguenots. The second campaign of Orange then failed as pitifully as his first. The repression was terrible;

Malines and other towns were given up to be sacked by Spanish soldiery ; even the churches and monasteries were not spared. But Holland and Zeeland, easily provisioned by the sea and the rivers and secretly favoured by the Queen of England, made head against the Spaniards.

Discouraged by these reverses, and more and more embarrassed by lack of money, the king finally recalled the Duke of Alva (October 1573). Some months before, the bishops had begged for his recall, and protested against the cruelty of the governor ; ‘ war should be made ’, they had written, ‘ if not in a holy, at least in a Christian, manner ’. The king replaced the Duke of Alva by Don Louis de Requesens, Governor of Milan, who had commanded the galleys at the battle of Lepanto.

*iv. Successes of the Rebels ; the Pacification of Ghent*

The new governor had been instructed to abandon the repressive system which had been in force hitherto : but he had also strict orders to act in accord with the duke, and was persuaded by him to ‘ lay aside gentleness and clemency and to rely upon arms alone ’. Requesens was soon as unpopular as his predecessor had been, and when he attempted to enter into negotiations with the rebels, it was too late.

Despite the victory gained by the Spaniards over the forces of Louis and Henry of Nassau at Mook, near Nimeguen, the revolution triumphed in Zeeland and in Holland, in the latter of which the siege of Leyden made little progress. Requesens announced the abolition of the Council of Troubles, as well as of the tenth and twentieth penny. The States-General regarded this as a sign of weakness and demanded the removal of the foreign troops, who ravaged the country and treated the inhabitants like slaves.

The rebellion soon made new and rapid progress. The Spanish army blockading Leyden was surprised by the waters

as the result of the voluntary breaking of the neighbouring dikes, and was obliged to raise the siege of that city (October 1574). Requesens negotiated indirectly with the Prince of Orange, who had definitively established himself in Holland. Orange demanded a return to the historic system of government and the settlement of the religious question in consultation with the States-General. The governor, however, was not empowered to give way on these points; he had, first of all, to make the will of the king prevail.

Requesens then conceived the idea of throwing the royal army on the centre of the rebels and of occupying the positions which would separate Holland from Zealand. The Spaniards showed marvellous bravery and conquered part of Zealand (1575). For want of money Requesens was unable to follow up this advantage, and, exhausted by overwork and overwhelmed by his anxieties, he died at Brussels in March 1576.

The Council of State, which assumed the regency, was powerless in face of the prevailing anarchy. Philip II had deprived it of all power of initiative, with the result that the Spanish troops, who had left their quarters in order to exact their pay, were able to capture Alost and to convert it into a base from which to carry on brigandage. The people of Brussels took up arms to prevent an expected attack. There was now formed the party of the 'true patriots', or *politiques*, who, under the influence of the Prince of Orange, demanded that the authority of the States-General should be superior to that of the king. This party maintained the principle that princes are made for peoples and not peoples for princes. The Council of State having revealed the plans of the patriots to Philip II, the agents of William of Orange placed its members under arrest. This act of violence was an act of open rebellion and inaugurated the revolution.

The States of Brabant of their own accord invited the

States of the other provinces to unite with them in defiance of the prerogatives of the sovereign. The States-General substituted themselves for the king by forming a real congress of the whole of the Low Countries. They sent to Philip II a letter protesting their loyalty, but expressing their determination to put an end by their own action to the sufferings which the land had endured since the coming of the Duke of Alva, and demanding the withdrawal of the Spanish soldiers. The troops of the States-General expelled the Spanish garrisons, who, however, collected again at Antwerp and completely sacked that city. The 'Spanish Fury' served to hasten the conclusion of the famous treaty known as the Pacification of Ghent (1576). This act established an accord between the States-General and the States of Holland and of Zealand, with the object of freeing the country from the foreign yoke. It left the religious question in suspense, stipulating that the States-General should ultimately regulate the exercise of religion, but the States of Holland and of Zealand secured that the reformed religion should remain provisionally the only form of worship authorized in their provinces. These two provinces formed a species of state within the State, a special political community under the direction of the Prince of Orange, who had been raised in 1572 to the position of Stadtholder.

Philip II had designed his natural brother, Don John, the victor of Lepanto, as the successor of Requesens with the mission of repairing the disastrous work of his two predecessors. He had advised him to restore the system of Charles V and to make every possible concession, provided that the Catholic religion and the royal supremacy were maintained intact. Immediately upon his arrival, which coincided with the publication of the Pacification of Ghent, Don John declared himself ready to negotiate; some months later he signed the edict of Marche, approving the Pacification and promising



the departure of the Spanish troops within twenty days. But by the same edict he reserved the exclusive maintenance of the Catholic religion, in consequence of which Holland and Zealand were unable to accept it.

The Prince of Orange soon began an active propaganda against Don John, and this propaganda was so successful that many even of the Catholics became suspicious of the intentions of the governor. Finally, when Don John discovered that men in the pay of the Prince of Orange were proposing to seize his person, he retired hurriedly to Namur, seized the citadel of that town by surprise, and recalled the Spanish regiments who had left the country. On their side, the States, by bribing part of the Walloon companies quartered in the citadel of Antwerp, succeeded in making themselves masters of that place, the most important in the country. They summoned the Prince of Orange to Brussels, and he made his entry into the great Brabançon city on September 3, 1577, in the midst of indescribable enthusiasm, and was proclaimed *ruwaert* or regent of Brabant. He immediately declared Don John an enemy of the country and offered the government to the brother of the Emperor Rudolf II, the Archduke Matthias, who recognized the Prince of Orange as his lieutenant. This was the triumph of the Orange party, but at the very moment signs of division appeared; the Calvinists showed themselves aggressive and monopolized communal offices at Brussels, Ghent, and other towns, while many of the Catholics feared the ascendancy acquired by the Prince of Orange and were unable to forgive him for his religious tolerance.

#### v. The Secession

In the course of the year 1578, the federation of the Belgic provinces, or federated Belgium, as it is described in a number of medals struck at this period, broke up amid incredible

anarchy. As often occurs during revolutions, the moderates were overwhelmed by the extremists. The hottest Calvinists committed numerous excesses, and persecuted not only the Catholics but also the Lutherans and such of their own co-religionists as they regarded as too lukewarm. Pastor Dathenus preached at Ghent against the Prince of Orange, whom he described as Antichrist. At Brussels the Calvinists seized the magistracies of the city in order to establish their system of a theocratic republic. The Calvinists of Ghent followed this example, and imprisoned the Duke of Aerschot, Governor of Flanders, as well as the bishops of Bruges and Ypres and various prominent Catholics. The States-General, by their protests, could only succeed in securing the release of Aerschot. Bruges was surprised by a body of Calvinists from Ghent, and in its turn fell under the control of the theocratic demagogy. Many other towns suffered the same fate and experienced at the hands of the Calvinists a veritable reign of terror; priests and monks were maltreated, churches were closed or converted to other uses, convents were sacked.

The fury of these extremists grew still higher after the victory gained at Gembloux by Don John over the army of the States-General (January 31, 1578). These excesses produced a violent reaction; in Artois and in Hainault the Catholics formed the party of the 'Malcontents', which found many adherents among the nobility. They refused to subscribe to the 'religious peace', proclaimed by the States-General and the result of a suggestion made by the Prince of Orange. Orange preached religious toleration as a means of avoiding civil war and of securing the expulsion of the common enemy. He would have left to a council of Catholics and Protestants the regulation of the religious question, which the Pacification of Ghent had reserved to the States-General. His 'religious

peace' was as badly received by the Calvinists of Holland and Zealand as by the ultra-Catholics.

Meanwhile, the States-General, which had withdrawn to Antwerp, fell under the influence of the moderate Catholics. They first appealed to John Casimir, brother of the Elector Palatine, but after the victory of their army at Rymenam, near Malines, they placed themselves under the protection of the Duke of Anjou, brother of Henry III, King of France. If Don John had not been abandoned by Philip II to his own resources, if he had had sufficient money to pay his troops and stop their continual mutinies, he could have profited by the disorganized condition of his opponents. But the victor of Lepanto, embarrassed by the conflicting instructions sent to him from Spain and by Philip II's constant changes of policy, was reduced to inaction in his camp of Bouges near Namur. There he died, broken-hearted, on October 1, 1578, leaving the command of his army to Alexander Farnese, son of Margaret of Parma.

Alexander Farnese, who had already given proof of remarkable military talent, showed himself also to be a diplomatist of singular ability. He succeeded in winning over a large number of Catholic nobles, 'by promises, promotions to honours and estates, and in other ways'. These nobles, however, agreed in exacting guarantees against any revival of the former violence, and demanded the observance of the Pacification of Ghent. They did not wish to break the Union of Arras (1579), which had been concluded between the provinces of Artois and Hainault and Walloon Flanders, and which, amongst other points, contained a stipulation to the effect that the true aim of the union was always the preservation of the Catholic faith and the maintenance of royal authority. The States-General in vain attempted to prevent the defection of these provinces by insisting that it was before all things

necessary to expel 'the cruel tyrant and common enemy of all the Belgic race'. On their side the Protestant provinces (Holland, Zealand, Guelders, Utrecht, and Groningen), to which the Calvinistic towns of Flanders and Brabant soon joined themselves, concluded shortly afterwards the Union of Utrecht (1579). This treaty preserved in the case of the provinces of Holland and Zealand the exceptional settlement of the religious question which had been established by the Pacification of Ghent, and introduced the 'religious peace' into the other provinces. The division between the revolutionary parties was completed.

When Farnese submitted to the king his scheme for an alliance with the signatories of the Union of Arras, he suggested that it would be possible to 'render harmless' those clauses which were contrary to the Pacification of Ghent by the method of interpreting them. The agreement was concluded in May 1579; Farnese under its terms consented to withdraw the Spanish troops, but did not fulfil his promise until March in the following year. He made use of those troops to capture Maastricht, which surrendered after a long siege. Immediately after the fall of that city, Malines and Bois-le-Duc declared in his favour.

Calvinism, however, triumphed definitely in the north, and the Prince of Orange was thus led to abandon the full application of the 'religious peace'. He began at the same time to practise Calvinism in place of Lutherism, to which he had been earlier converted. It was then that Philip II, on the advice of Granvelle, set a price on his head, designating him as 'the sole chief, author, and promoter of the troubles'. The Silent One answered this indictment to murder by an 'Apology', in the shape of a letter to the States-General. It is an eloquent and passionate plea in favour of the sovereignty of the nation, represented by that assembly. The prince



declared his readiness to die for his country : ' If you think ', he told the States-General, ' that my death will serve you, I am ready to obey you. . . . Here is my head, over which no prince or monarch has power, but only you.' He thus denied the legitimacy of royal authority and opposed to it the authority of the nation.

In order to carry on the struggle against Philip II, he sought the help of Queen Elizabeth of England, but obtained only indirect support. Thanks to her, however, he succeeded in securing the alliance of the Duke of Anjou. He was obliged to employ all his diplomatic skill to convince the States-General of the need for recognizing the French duke as prince of the Low Countries in order to assure the military co-operation of France. On July 26, 1581, the States-General, assembled at the Hague, solemnly proclaimed the deposition of Philip II, thus affirming the sovereignty of the people.

Meanwhile Farnese prepared to resume the attack on the Protestant provinces. He so successfully won the confidence of the pacified party that he persuaded them to ask for the return of the Spanish troops. He captured Tournai (November 1581) and granted especially moderate terms to that city. Abandoning the policy of striking terror which his predecessors had practised, he allowed the Princess d'Épinoy, who had heroically defended the city, to retire with the honours of war ; he granted a complete amnesty to the burghers and authorized the Protestants to leave the place after selling their property, or even to reside there while practising their religion only in private. He treated other towns in a similar manner, and this moderation secured him the sympathy of many.

As for the Duke of Anjou, he came to take possession of the Netherlands, but without a sufficient force to check the progress of Farnese. Dissatisfied with the restrictions placed on his authority, he planned to overthrow the supremacy of the

States-General by a sudden stroke. His troops suddenly occupied Antwerp ; the burghers of the place drove them out after a terrible battle in the streets, and the pitiable result of this ' French Fury ' forced its originator to retire to France, beaten and ashamed (1583).

During this time the operations of Farnese methodically progressed. At the beginning of the year 1583, he continued his siege warfare ; he blockaded the various places which had in the course of the troubles fortified themselves in the ' Huguenot fashion ', that is by earthworks, and reduced them by famine. Dunkirk, Ypres, Bruges, and the majority of the smaller towns in Flanders capitulated in this year. Ghent fell the following year, some weeks after the assassination of the Prince of Orange by Balthazar Gerard at Delft (1584). Brussels, exhausted by hunger, capitulated at the beginning of 1585, which year was also marked by the fall of Antwerp. That last bulwark of the southern provinces, defended by Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde, was blockaded in its turn, after the Italian engineers of Farnese had barred the river below the city by means of a boom thrown across it ; failing to secure any fresh supplies, the town could not escape famine, and the men of Holland and Zealand were unable to assist it by breaking the blockade. Its capitulation took place on August 17, 1585.

Farnese had revived the prestige of the Spanish arms. He was unable, however, to accomplish the more difficult part of his work, the conquest of the mouths of the Scheldt, Meuse, and Rhine, the last refuges of the Reformation and of the republic. He achieved some further successes, capturing Sluys (L'Écluse) amongst other places, but he was diverted from the pursuit of his aims by Philip II himself, who compelled him to co-operate in the famous expedition of the Invincible Armada against England, and then, after the lamentable failure of that undertaking, to take part in the war in France against

Henry of Navarre. When he complained to Philip II of the fact that this campaign involved the neglect of the Low Countries, the king replied that the object of the French expedition was to secure 'the welfare, repose, and tranquillity' of the Netherlands. Discouraged and worn out, Farnese died in complete disgrace (1592), having been actually superseded by Count Fuentes, who was charged to rule in strict accordance with the king's commands, which had been sometimes transgressed by the late governor.

Lack of money again produced a number of military mutinies in the Belgian provinces, while the United Provinces took the offensive and allied with the victorious Henry IV (1595). Fuentes nevertheless succeeded in reorganizing the Spanish armies, repulsed the attack, and soon received reinforcements from the Archduke Albert, son of the Emperor Maximilian II, who was appointed governor in 1596.

In order to save the Low Countries, however, Philip II found himself obliged to make peace with Henry IV. By the Peace of Vervins he restored to Henry the conquests which he had made in France (1598). In the same year he ceded the Netherlands to his eldest daughter, Isabella, and to the Archduke Albert, who was to marry the princess. Philip hoped in this way to regain with more ease the obedience of the northern provinces and to reconstitute the Burgundian state, in the form of a 'citadel of steel', to the advantage of Spain. He died before witnessing the completion of this cession, but after having given the most minute instructions for its performance (1598).

Philip II left Belgium in a deplorable condition. Not only was economic distress extreme; much land was untilled; bands of robbers infested the country; commerce was destroyed and industry was languishing; many artisans had emigrated. The towns had, for the most part, lost a third of their

inhabitants. Louvain, an especially loyal city, which had 20,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the sixteenth century, had no more than 9,000 at its end. But to material ruin and social disorder intellectual decay was added. The University of Louvain was only the shadow of its former self. This once flourishing place of education, which had contained some 2,000 students (Erasmus gave it even 3,000), had seen its scholars dispersed and its professors reduced to such straits that Pope Gregory XIII sent them financial help.

Philip II had foreseen these disasters. In 1566 he had written to his ambassador at the Holy See, asking him to tell the pope that if he found himself obliged to use force, it would 'involve the utter destruction of this country'. But he added that he would resolve on that rather than 'be in thought or will a lord of heretics'.



## *The Catholic Renaissance (1598-1713)*

### *i. The Hispano-Belgian Régime*

THE personal union which existed between Belgium and Spain down to the beginning of the eighteenth century has long been misunderstood. It has been supposed that it involved the complete subordination of the former to the latter, the total absorption of the Belgian lands in the dominions of the Spanish Habsburgs. The period during which this personal union lasted has accordingly been termed that of the Spanish régime, and even that of the Spanish domination. In reality, Belgium shared the destiny of Spain only with regard to foreign relations, while preserving her own individuality and her national institutions. She enjoyed, therefore, a sort of semi-independence.

The successors of Philip II never attempted to assimilate Belgium entirely to the rest of their monarchy; they reigned in the Belgian principalities as the local sovereign of each one of them (Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders, &c.). While aiming at making their rule more and more absolute in practice, they never attempted to abolish the traditional rights of the country, where the spirit of self-government had so strongly developed. In opposition to the growing power of the prince, based on divine right, the country always claimed 'the ancient franchise, liberty, and sovereignty' of the nation. A compromise was thus established, a species of mixed government which, while tending always towards pure monarchy, permitted a certain number of local and provincial privileges to survive.

If the continued presence of the Spanish troops gave Belgium

the appearance of a camp, the country yet never had to submit to a military government. The kings of Spain were content to be able to use the territory as a base of operations in case of war against the neighbouring states. The act of cession to the Archdukes Albert and Isabella formally reserved to the King of Spain the citadels of the most important places, Antwerp, Ghent, and Cambrai, and some other fortresses. The King of Spain further retained the ultimate authority over the government of the Belgian provinces; the same act provided that the eventual successors of the archdukes might not contract marriage without the authorization of the king, and that, in default of issue, the Low Countries should revert to Spain. As early as 1616, Philip III caused himself to be recognized as sovereign by the provinces.

The archdukes (1598–1621), and the governors who succeeded them, were mere instruments in the hands of the kings of Spain, and they often had at their side as secretary of state or of war royal agents of Spanish nationality, who really directed the general course of their policy. The nobles were excluded from the collateral councils and were replaced by the magistrates, who were far more tractable and were inspired by the principles of absolutism preached by the ‘regius professors’ of the University of Louvain.

Despite the servility of the lesser councils, the governors in many cases abstained from consulting them and entrusted the control of important affairs to special or ‘joint commissions’, which were mainly composed of foreigners.

Even the Council of State ceased to be summoned and the knights of the Golden Fleece lost all collective influence. The result was lively discontent among the chief of the nobility, which produced in 1632–3 an actual conspiracy against the government. The conspiracy was led by Count Henry de Bergh, who hoped to produce a national movement analogous

to the revolt against Philip II, and to break the personal union with Spain, by means of an alliance with France and the United Provinces. But his attempt failed, since the mass of the nation refused to follow him. The Archduchess Isabella, moreover, manœuvred with great skill by giving way partially to public opinion and calling the States-General together. But when the plot had been discovered and its leaders subjected to exemplary punishment, the assembly of the States was dissolved. It never met again until the Brabançon Revolution. When the governor, Maximilian Emmanuel of Bavaria, wished to reassemble the States at the close of the eighteenth century, he was forbidden to do so by the Spanish government.

As the country, in the eyes of its rulers, was important only as a strategic base, the army naturally received the special attention of the central government. It was entirely composed of Spanish troops, with the exception of some artillery companies commanded by Belgian nobles and otherwise organized on the Spanish model. More than half the military charges fell upon the country. The army being permanent, the taxes became equally permanent, and the government was obliged to have recourse to extraordinary imposts too, and for that purpose often summoned the provincial States.

The provinces preserved a pretty large amount of autonomy, especially Brabant, which possessed a written constitution, the celebrated 'Joyous Entry'. Though the governors of the provinces lost their military functions (the governorship of Flanders was even suppressed), the States of the provinces retained their historic powers, notably the right to vote taxes. They even secured (except in Luxemburg, the district of Tournai, and certain lands retroceded by Flanders), to the detriment of the chambers of accounts and of the royal receivers, the right to apportion, collect, and receive the imposts which formed part of the subsidy voted by the States. They con-

tinued to have control over the collective affairs of their respective provinces, such as the repair and construction of dikes and bridges, the making of canals and other public works.

Municipal spirit remained particularly active, above all in Brabant. In the towns of that province, which had preserved their mediaeval constitution better than their Flemish sisters had done, a new governing class grew up, claiming to descend from that of the Middle Ages, and perpetuated the ancient communal traditions, such as taking arms at the appeal of the magistrate, either to prevent disturbances or to increase the pomp of religious ceremonies or local fêtes. But the government intervened more in the election of magistrates and caused them to be supervised by its commissaries. It did not, however, attempt to combat the parochial spirit and the exclusiveness of the towns in economic matters. It was above all the corporations of artisans that maintained this exclusive system by asserting their ancient privileges and monopolies. But some magistrates made away with the charters of corporate privileges; the magistracy of Brussels hid a large number in a tower, where they were found again at the end of the seventeenth century, when the tower was half destroyed during the bombardment of the city by Villeroy.

### *ii. Territorial Dismemberment*

The policy of Spain was fatal to Belgium. It involved her in a series of disastrous wars, not only against the United Provinces, but also against France. By the Peace of Vervins (1598) Philip II had attempted to separate France and Holland, but Henry IV continued to render secret support to his ally. Maurice of Nassau invaded Flanders in 1600 and gained a victory over the Archduke Albert at Nieupoort (1602), but was unable to follow up his success. To anticipate a further invasion, Albert attempted to capture Ostend in the following





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year; the Dutch fleet so effectually revictualled the place that it held out for three years. The capture of Ostend (1604), due to Ambrose Spinola, sent by King Philip III to command the Spanish troops, was soon counterbalanced by the loss of Sluys. Spinola then took the offensive, but secured no decisive success, and in 1609 a twelve years' truce was concluded, recognizing the independence of the United Provinces, and maintaining the closing of the Scheldt.

At the expiration of this truce, Spinola rendered more great services to the Catholic king. He captured Breda (1625), but the finances of Spain, depleted by military expenses, did not allow him to continue the offensive. After the recall of that eminent general, Bois-le-Duc and Maastricht fell into the hands of the Dutch.

The alliance concluded in 1635 between France and the United Provinces led to new disasters for Belgium. After having attempted to provoke a rising of the Belgian nobles, the allies agreed on the partition of the conquests which were to be made in Belgium and on the conversion of the remains of that country into a barrier state; this in order to prevent conflicts between themselves.

The Cardinal-Infant Don Ferdinand, brother of Philip IV, at first offered a vigorous opposition, but later lost Breda, Arras, La Bassée, and Bapaume. The defeat of his successor, Don Francisco de Melo, at Rocroy (1643), would have been a catastrophe, if the United Provinces on their side had followed it up with vigour. Their inaction was the outcome of the fact that they had no wish to extend their conquests. The capture of Dunkirk by the French (1646) led them to fear French competition in the waters of the North Sea. Consequently, when the Congress of Munster opened, the Dutch delegates came to a speedy arrangement with the ambassadors of Spain.

The Peace of Munster (1648) assured to the United Provinces all their conquests and confirmed the closing of the Scheldt. The Catholic king capitulated to the Protestant republic. In order to turn his forces against Louis XIV, Philip IV sacrificed Belgium. The definitive closing of the Scheldt completed the ruin of the country, formerly 'a land common to all nations', but now become 'a miserable blind alley—a road with no outlet'. And, by a singular irony, Belgium, now absolutely closed on the side of the sea, continued to be bound to that Spanish monarchy, on whose territories 'the sun never set'.

On the morrow of the Peace of Munster, Philip IV already thought of forming a close alliance with the republic, whose independence he had been forced to recognize. His scheme was not realized till a later time. The King of Spain was able to profit by the civil wars which the Fronde produced in France. Condé even entered his service and took command of the Spanish forces in the Low Countries, in conjunction with Don John of Austria. But Turenne defeated them both at the battle of the Dunes, which was followed by the fall of Dunkirk (1658), retaken by the Spaniards in 1650; he next captured Oudenarde and Ypres and threatened Brussels and Ghent. The French conquests in Belgium began to alarm the United Provinces, which gradually drew closer to Spain. Fear that this *rapprochement* would result in an alliance was one of the motives which led France to conclude the Peace of the Pyrenees (1659).

Wishing to preserve intact her colonial empire, Spain consented to the further dismemberment of Belgium. She ceded to France a large part of Artois, Dunkirk,<sup>1</sup> and several other towns in maritime Flanders, Landrecies, Le Quesnoy,

<sup>1</sup> Dunkirk had been handed over by France to England in 1658. Charles II sold the place to Louis XIV in 1662.

and Avesnes (that is, the western part of Hainault), Mariembourg, and Philippeville (two fortresses built at the close of the reign of Charles V in territories detached from the principality of Liège); Thionville and several other places in the duchy of Luxemburg. From this time Louis XIV held the keys of the country, the whole of which he proposed to annex. By the same treaty of the Pyrenees he obtained the hand of his cousin, Maria Theresa, daughter of Philip IV. The bride was to receive a dowry of 500,000 gold crowns, in consideration of which she renounced all rights to her father's succession.

The republic of the United Provinces feared the aggressive policy of the French king, and the Grand Pensionary, John de Witt, reverted to the idea of Richelieu, the creation of a buffer state between the two rival powers, 'with a view to preventing any dangerous friction', and a rectification of frontiers for their benefit; the state would have been deprived of all her sea-coast, since Nieuport would have passed to France and Ostend to the United Provinces. Louis XIV rejected this scheme, and on the death of Philip IV (1667)—without a declaration of war, since he was ostensibly only taking possession of his own property—ordered Turenne's troops to occupy many places in maritime Flanders and later a whole series of towns in the interior. Alarmed at this new advance, England and the United Provinces, then at war, made peace with each other and offered Louis favourable terms of settlement: the annexation of a network of strong places in Belgium, distributed in a wide semicircle from Furnes to Charleroi, and including Oudenarde, Binche, and Ath, which threatened respectively Ghent, Mons, and Brussels. The Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1668), presided over by the Nuncio, 'a phantom arbitrator between phantom ambassadors', forced Spain, always anxious about her colonial empire, to accept the decision of the maritime powers.



Louis XIV did not abandon his design : convinced that the true way to attain it was to overthrow the Dutch, 'to annihilate them if possible', he decided to make war on them. He succeeded in isolating Holland by diplomatic means and then hurled his armies upon it ; they reached the Rhine, some part of them passing through the territory of the Bishop of Liège. Count Monterey, governor-general of the Spanish Netherlands, sent help to Holland at the moment when the French armies were greatly imperilled by the opening of the dikes. Louis XIV thereupon ordered the invasion of Belgium (1673) and occupied the territory of Liège. Despite the victory of his troops at Seneffe, he agreed to make peace in order to dissolve the coalition by which he was threatened. England was especially concerned not to leave Flanders in the hands of Louis XIV. It was at this time that the ambassador of France, reporting to his government the unanimous opinion of the House of Commons, wrote the famous phrase, 'The English will give the shirts off their backs to prevent the French from penetrating into the Low Countries'. Louis XIV agreed to the establishment of a barrier demanded by Holland. He was unwilling to compromise his dearly bought conquests. During the progress of the negotiations which opened at Nimeguen, however, his armies took Ghent and Ypres (1678), to the great dissatisfaction of England. Finally, the Treaty of Nimeguen (1679) established the famous barrier, for the creation of which the King of France ceded Charleroi, Binche, Ath, Oudenarde, and Courtrai, but obtained in exchange for these places a much larger number of new acquisitions, notably Valenciennes, Cambrai, Maubeuge, Charlemont, &c. He also acquired the duchy of Bouillon, taken from the principality of Liège.

The dependencies of all the towns ceded to France had not been clearly defined by the treaty. The ministers of Louis XIV

were thus able, by the erection of Chambers of Reunion, to effect conquests during peace; the French troops refused to evacuate numerous localities in Flanders, and further seized new points in Luxemburg, and even invested that city itself. Spain thereupon appealed to Holland, which regarded Luxemburg as essential to the barrier; Louis XIV consented to raise the siege provisionally, but soon categorically demanded the cession of all the lands which he alleged to belong to him. Holland, however, distrusting the weakness of the line of fortresses from the sea to the Meuse, wished to extend it to the Moselle. She further placed at the disposal of Spain troops to defend all these places, but, owing to her internal dissensions, did not intervene in an effective way. Louis XIV laid siege to Luxemburg, which fell after some weeks. An arrangement was arrived at between France and the United Provinces by which the fortress was left in the hands of Louis XIV (Truce of Ratisbon, 1684).

When William III formed the Grand Alliance against Louis XIV, Spain also joined it (1690), but her armies were defeated at Fleurus. On the suggestion of William III Charles II then entrusted the governorship-general of the Netherlands, with quasi-sovereign powers, to Maximilian Emmanuel of Bavaria, whose military reputation was well established. Nevertheless, the French armies succeeded in forcing the line of the barrier fortresses, and gained the victories of Steenkerk and Neerwinden (1693). Only two years later did the allies regain some of their lost ground, including Namur, the capture of which in 1692 by the Grand Monarch had been particularly celebrated. Finally, Louis XIV was forced to restore Luxemburg (Peace of Ryswyk, 1697).

The death of Charles II (1700) produced the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the Belgian provinces were again involved. Louis XIV accepted the will of the dead king, who

had appointed as his heir Philip, Duke of Anjou, grandson of the King of France. When Philip went to take possession of the Spanish monarchy, he entrusted to his grandfather the task of directing the affairs of the Catholic Netherlands. Louis XIV caused his troops to occupy the Belgian fortresses in which the Dutch maintained garrisons.

In 1701 William III, Stadtholder of Holland and King of England, organized the Great Alliance of The Hague in order to 'recover and conquer the provinces of the Spanish Netherlands, so that they may serve as a dike, rampart, and barrier to separate and divide France from the United Provinces'.

In order to secure the co-operation of Maximilian Emmanuel of Bavaria, governor of the Low Countries, Louis XIV promised him the sovereignty of those provinces, stipulating for the cession of Luxemburg, the district of Namur, and Hainault county, and Philip V afterwards nominated him as his vicar-general in the Netherlands. This combination offended Holland and England. The statesmen of those two countries conceived the project of forming the Southern Low Countries into a Catholic republic, 'which, united and allied with the Protestant republic of Holland, would keep Europe in permanent peace'. According to this scheme, all the European powers were to ally themselves with this republic, which would maintain the equilibrium so much desired. It was, it appears, intended to be a species of guaranteed neutrality which should protect 'this fair portion of the world'—to quote the authors of the project—from the greed of the two great Continental powers, France and Austria. But the Dutch merchant princes, fearing the competition of Antwerp, secured the partial occupation of Belgium (*cantonement*)—that is, the establishment of a solid barrier defended by Dutch garrisons.

The Franco-Spanish army at first took up its position behind a line of entrenchments constructed from Antwerp to Namur,

but in 1706 Marlborough succeeded in piercing this line by gaining a victory at Ramillies. Almost the whole of Belgium then fell into the hands of the allies. Three years later a renewed offensive by the French in Flanders was repulsed, and Marlborough, in conjunction with Prince Eugene, forced them to evacuate Hainault, after defeating them at Malplaquet, near Mons.

Negotiations opened at Utrecht at the beginning of the year 1712, and came to a conclusion in the spring of the following year. By the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), France and Spain ceded the Catholic Netherlands to the United Provinces, by whom they were to be handed over to the House of Austria after an agreement had been reached with it on the question of a barrier. The Emperor Charles VI, an Austrian Habsburg, thus succeeded in Belgium to Charles II, the last Spanish Habsburg.

### *iii. Economic Decline and Social Changes*

The numerous wars which the Habsburgs of Spain drew upon the land of Belgium hastened the economic decadence which began with the establishment of the United Provinces. The latter enslaved the country commercially by closing the Scheldt and by preventing the ports on the coast from sharing in international trade. The Spanish fleet was unable to break the blockade maintained before those ports by the Dutch during the various wars. On its side the Spanish government forbade all trade with the revolted provinces, but in view of the impossibility of enforcing this prohibition, it sold passports or licences to certain merchants and eventually even exempted from the prohibition a number of commodities, levying instead very heavy import and export duties.

The country was really exploited by the neighbouring powers, and, despite numerous protectionist measures, was flooded with foreign goods. The merchandise of France





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entered fraudulently in large amounts and often with the connivance of the government. England poured on the Belgian market her manufactured goods and the products of her mines and colonies, while absolutely prohibiting the entry of certain Belgian goods, cloth, lace, and haberdashery, into England ; she levied enormous duties on others, flax, cloth, and velvet. Holland adopted an analogous line of conduct, requiring reductions and exemptions from duty for her merchandise, while insisting on the free export to her of those Belgian products which she needed, such as wood, iron, stone, &c. The government of Brussels occasionally attempted to resort to reprisals, but was forced to abandon them in face of the menaces of the maritime powers.

Internal commerce was hampered, not only by the almost continuous wars but also by the defective means of communication. The roads were badly maintained and the network of canals was still very incomplete (there were only the canals from Brussels to the Rupel, and from Ghent to Terneuzen) ; the States of Flanders began as early as 1614 the canal from Ghent to Bruges, but it was not completed till the following century. Bruges was linked to the sea by the canal of Ostend in 1665. As for industry, already greatly reduced by the migration of many workers owing to the religious wars, it could scarcely meet the competition of neighbouring countries, and more especially of France, in the sphere of articles of luxury. Colbert created a formidable rival to the Belgian tapestry trade by establishing at Paris (1662) the 'Royal Manufactory of Household Goods of the Crown', known as the 'Gobelins'. In addition to this, artisans from Flanders and Brabant also introduced the art of tapestry-making into England. It was in vain that the government prohibited the export of the raw materials of the weaving industry ; its ruin was irretrievable.

The only industries which prospered during the seventeenth century were that of linen (spinning and weaving) and that of lace-making. The latter gave employment to thousands of women, especially at Malines, Ghent, Brussels, and Antwerp. The manufacture of silk-stuffs also developed at Antwerp. But many forms of industry migrated from that city and were transferred to Brussels, especially a glassworks and a crystal factory. Brussels began to develop remarkably, but this development was unfortunately interrupted by the bombardment of the city by Villeroy in 1695. Manufactories of cloth, Spanish leathers, and Delft china were established there, as well as soap works and salt refineries. The making of arms and hats and other luxury trades attained a great measure of prosperity there.

Even more than the towns the rural districts were impoverished by the 'passing and repassing of soldiery'. Famine several times raged in the whole country, and misery multiplied vagrants like vermin; their number was augmented by discharged soldiers. But the rural population increased the product of the soil by intensive cultivation and also profited from the fact that the majority of the new industries, such as that of linen, were established in the country. In the district of Liège, coal-mining made constant progress, thanks to improved methods of extraction; but in Hainault, where it was confined to the area between Mariemont and Quiévrain, it hardly developed at all, any more than glass-making did in the territory of Namur.

Population increased in the rural districts until the middle of the seventeenth century, while it diminished in the towns. Antwerp had little more than 60,000 inhabitants at this time. Almost everywhere poverty increased; the government vainly attempted to remedy it by creating *Monts-de-Piété* (1618), at which the poor could secure free loans.

The relative prosperity of the rural districts enabled the nobility to increase their resources and so to play once more an important part in the social organization. The class was increased by the accession of new elements, magistrates, officials, who, as the crown of their careers or for services rendered to the government, received from it letters of nobility. Side by side with the nobles of the sword, a real nobility of the robe was formed, drawn from the ranks of the *bourgeoisie*, a class greatly reduced by the decline of industry and of the trade of towns; it included the descendants of all those who had held the higher posts in the judicature or in the financial administration.

The lower and middle ranks of the *bourgeoisie* suffered most from the economic distress. To combat its disastrous effects, the corporations of workers demanded the strict enforcement of their old privileges. This merely served to accentuate the rivalry between them. Tailors and dealers in clothes, shoemakers and cobblers, surgeons and barbers, were constantly in conflict and engaged in endless suits as to the monopoly of the sale of certain commodities.

At this time the towns had lost the social preponderance which they had so long possessed in the great principalities; they sank for a time below the two older privileged classes, the nobles and, still more, the clergy.

The last-named class became beyond question the first estate in fact, as it had always been in theory. Thanks to generous gifts, its wealth increased to vast proportions. Moreover, its privileges were not reduced by the growth of monarchical centralization.

The clergy preserved in particular a special jurisdiction, the right of being tried only by their own courts; they also secured the almost complete control of charity and education. The Church enjoyed the support not only of the government,



but also of the great and of the middle-class families, from which it was recruited, and possessed the confidence of the whole people, whose material and moral condition it laboured to improve. But it was hindered in its works by various circumstances. As a result of the extraordinary ascendancy of the monastic orders and of the Society of Jesus, the mass of the lower secular clergy, the proletariat of the Church, found their condition growing constantly more wretched and became unable to fulfil the duties of their office. The choice of the lower clergy left much to be desired, despite the foundation of seminaries. Just as in France, there were 'many candidates for the more prominent positions, but few ready to labour in the rural districts'.

#### *iv. Growth of Catholicism*

The Catholic Renaissance was more brilliant and more vigorous in Belgium than in any other land. Placed on the confines of the Catholic world, the country was the object of special attention on the part of the Church and, above all, of the Order of the Jesuits. The Jesuits may be said to have made it the most Catholic country in Europe. Thanks to the protection of the government, and more particularly of Albert and Isabella, the society received subsidies and exemptions from taxation, and founded houses in most towns, in addition to a large number of colleges. By the end of the sixteenth century they provided in a measure for the education of the *bourgeoisie* and the aristocracy. They thus penetrated all social life, and their work was completed by the mendicant orders, whose influence was exercised over the poor as well as other classes. The archdukes summoned from Italy the barefooted Carmelites, and Carmelite nuns from Spain, and took under their protection the Minorites, the sisters of Sainte Claire, and those of the third order of Franciscans. The country was

covered with convents of the Capuchins and Carmelites, who were very popular. The immigration of foreign monks, especially English and Irish, assumed such proportions that Philip IV forbade the foundation of new convents without the express authorization of the government, his aim being to prevent monasteries from 'growing weak, choking each other, and dying like trees in a garden when they are too numerous'.

Jesuits and monks largely determined the direction of literary effort. Under the archdukes, an ordinance laid down that to become a printer or bookseller the authorization both of the bishop and of the magistrate must be secured. No book was to be published without the dual approval of royal and episcopal 'visitors', who might inspect when it seemed good to them the printing works and book-shops.

The intellectual horizon was thus restricted to the subjects tolerated by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Savants who transgressed these bounds were in danger of heavy punishment; Van Helmont was condemned by the Inquisition for his researches into animal magnetism. On the other hand, among the clergy themselves, theological disputes reached such a height as to affect civil and political life. The theories of Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, troubled Church and State for many years. They were made public after the death of their author by the publication of his book *Augustinus* (1640). In it he defended the Augustinian doctrine of grace in opposition to the doctrine held on this subject by the Jesuits and others. Essentially of a mystical temperament, Jansenius wished to restore what he believed to be 'Christian antiquity', and for this purpose he desired to reduce the gulf fixed between priest and layman, bringing the latter in a sense nearer to God by according a greater part to the individual conscience. In their conflict with the Jesuits, the Jansenists tended to adopt a more

austere and essentially personal form of religion. The struggle spread beyond the frontiers of Belgium and became particularly bitter in France, where it was mixed up with political questions. The Jansenist leaders even took refuge at Brussels, which became 'the fortress of the party'. The 'great' Arnauld and Quesnel disturbed the University of Louvain and flooded the country with writings of all kinds, printed in Holland. But the government adopted rigorous measures to prevent their spread, and the majority of the Jansenists emigrated to Holland.

The literary and scientific movement continued to be confined to an intellectual aristocracy, mainly recruited from the ranks of the clergy and opposed to the vulgarizing of knowledge; the jurisconsult Perez, professor at the University of Louvain, considered that the ignorance of the people favoured the authority of the prince. Writers were more than ever inspired by the works of classical antiquity, but they paid more attention to the form than to the matter. The most famous of them was Justus Lipsius (died 1606). Successively professor at Leyden and at Louvain, he devoted himself to the criticism and interpretation of Latin authors, more especially of the historians and philosophers (Tacitus and Seneca); he also wrote on the most diverse subjects, history, philosophy, hagiography, and politics. He defended contradictory theories, asserting liberty of conscience on the one hand, and on the other the right of the State to punish heretics. His disciples and those who continued his work further accentuated his tendencies; erudition degenerated into mere verbal facility; perfection of style more and more took the place of scientific depth. The philologists henceforth became poets, and among them some Jesuits were the foremost; they made trial of every type of verse of which the Romans have left specimens, tragic, comic, poetic, and didactic narrative,

but devoted themselves above all to the production of elegies, idylls, odes, and epigrams.

Ecclesiastical history was especially studied by the Jesuits. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Father Rosweyde conceived the idea of editing the lives of the saints from the most ancient texts. His work was resumed and revised by Father John Bollandus, who began the publication of the monumental *Acta Sanctorum*.

The Jesuits also included a certain number of prominent scientists, especially mathematicians. But scientific life scarcely manifested itself outside religious circles. Many savants from among the laity became famous abroad, among them, in the sphere of physics and mathematics, Simon Stévin of Bruges (died 1620), who emigrated to Holland. Among those who remained in Belgium, the most famous was Van Helmont (died 1644), one of the founders of pneumatic chemistry, who also gave a vigorous impulse to physical and geological science. From the second half of the seventeenth century there was a persistent decline in the scientific movement, and Belgium had no share in the great advance which marked this period.

Under the influence of the Jesuits, education assumed a new character, being devoted mainly to the spread of the classics and of mathematics. The Society founded colleges in such numbers that before the end of the sixteenth century they provided secondary education almost everywhere. The activity of the Jesuits also affected the University of Louvain, which was at first unfavourably disposed towards them. Colleges were also opened by the Augustinians, the Récollets, and the Oratorians, while the Ursulines undertook the education of girls of wealthy families. But neither the Jesuits nor the monks took much interest in primary education, which was left to the local clergy.

Religious instruction was the object of particular care.



Sunday schools were organized before the end of the sixteenth century; parents were obliged to send their children and masters their servants. The number of day schools increased at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Ordinances specially charged the magistrates to see that the children of the poor attended them.

The unparalleled exuberance of Latin culture to some extent stifled national literary effort. French literature in Belgium especially suffered from this state of affairs and was never at a lower ebb than in the age of Louis XIV. As for Flemish literature, it vegetated in the chambers of rhetoric. Its chief representative was Willem Ogier (died 1682), the author of vigorous popular comedies (*kluchten*) of a moralizing tendency. His contemporary, the Jesuit Poirters (died 1674), enjoyed an equal reputation owing to his popular sermons and his writings, which were full of allegories, anecdotes, jests, in contrast with Dutch severity, but which scourged indirectly the faults of the *bourgeoisie* and people.

If literature produced few outstanding works in the seventeenth century, the converse is true of the plastic arts. They admirably expressed the magnificence, the religious splendour of the epoch; they brilliantly celebrated the revival of Catholicism. This artistic outburst was unaffected by the decline of commerce and industry; it was, however, followed by early decay. It had been favoured by the existence of an extravagant and luxury-loving aristocracy. Antwerp did not at once lose her bankers and remained for a long while a money market, and it was Antwerp that was the great artistic centre. The Catholic Renaissance also, produced mainly by the Jesuits, vigorously seconded the development of religious art by filling places of worship with pictures and statues. It did not maintain, however, the Italian tradition which had prevailed from the sixteenth century. The most gifted interpreter of this

renaissance was P. P. Rubens (1577-1640). A pupil of Van Noort and Van Veen, he studied, according to custom, the Italian masters in their own land, but he did not allow himself to be wholly absorbed by this artistic atmosphere, and preserved always a vigorous individuality as a result of his intense realism, his fiery exuberance, and his brilliant and vigorous colouring. His admiration for the productions of Greco-Roman antiquity did not destroy his fondness for luxuriant, massive forms, and his figures preserve an essentially national character. From his studio at Antwerp came forth hundreds of pictures of religious history and mythology, allegories, portraits, landscapes, which went to adorn churches and palaces.

Around the 'prince' of Flemish painters there gathered a crowd of imitators, the most distinguished of whom were de Crayer and Jordaens. In them the 'Flemish' spirit was least affected in its expression by Italian influence. Jordaens especially has depicted the life of his class in striking tones. The numerous disciples of Rubens followed and exaggerated the traditions of his art. Van Dyck, however, was marked by a more tender feeling, an entirely aristocratic distinction. He was essentially a society painter, and soon left the country to settle at the court of the kings of England. The school of Rubens was not the only artistic school that flourished in Antwerp. Side by side with it was that of Teniers. David Teniers is above all the painter of Flemish manners, which he illustrated with extraordinary satiric spirit and in warm and glowing colours. Before the end of the sixteenth century, the decline of the schools of Antwerp had already begun; they had acquired a very great reputation, but from this time there were only copyists and imitators.

Sculpture and architecture were inspired, to a greater degree than painting, by Italian traditions, but soon fell under the influence of Rubens, who himself designed the façades of many

churches and private houses. Sculptors and architects attempted to imitate his spirit and his taste for the grandiose, but often fell into mannerisms and exaggerations. The Quellins and Verbruggens modelled with delicacy, in the style of Rubens, stalls, pulpits, and other accessories intended to increase the glory of religion.

The influence of the Italian Renaissance, which had at first transformed civil architecture, in the seventeenth century affected ecclesiastical architecture to a similar extent. In the preceding age, the influence of the Renaissance had appeared only in the details or in the subsidiary buildings of churches; in this period, whole edifices were reared in a style derived from Latin antiquity. Façades stuck on to buildings and presenting a series of the various classical styles were ill adapted, divided as they were into stories, to their internal construction. The luxurious character of their ornamentation corresponded with the splendour and prestige of the Church, but was in violent contrast with the majestic grandeur of the Gothic façades. The towers themselves were either left out or awkwardly built up by piling columns or pillars on each other (the most remarkable is the tower of the Jesuit church at Antwerp, 1614); they were sometimes replaced by cupolas (Montaigu, Notre-Dame of Hanswyk). The Gothic style, regarded by Rubens himself as 'barbarous', on the ground of its 'lack of symmetry and proportion', was replaced by what has been termed the Jesuit style, since the Jesuits adopted it in the majority of their buildings.

The systematic regularity which the new style introduced into lay buildings produced in many a monotonous appearance; among other instances may be mentioned the second town hall at Ghent. On the other hand, private houses and those of the corporations, with their elegantly rounded gables, reflect much better the rich inventiveness and grace of the

Renaissance. But eventually the pursuit of the picturesque destroyed beauty of line (house of Rubens, at Antwerp, 1611 ; houses of the corporations at Brussels, Antwerp, &c.).

Unlike the plastic arts, music was singularly neglected ; it fell under the influence of Italy and France. National composers turned mainly to sacred subjects, and it was from abroad that there came the lyric operas which were performed at Brussels and in the principal towns from the middle of the seventeenth century.



## *The Austrian Autocracy (1713-89)*

### *i. The Barrier System*

THE Emperor Charles VI at first declined to accept the sovereignty of Belgium coupled with the onerous obligations associated with it. The United Provinces claimed to make the whole Belgian territory a barrier, and to transform it into a buffer state. Negotiations opened at Antwerp in 1714 were difficult and lasted over a year. The resultant treaty definitely established the barrier, limiting it to one long line of fortresses in the south (Furnes, Knocke, Ypres, Warneton, Menin, Tournai, and Namur), with the addition of one fortress in the interior, Termonde, which was to receive an Anglo-Dutch garrison, the other points being occupied by Dutch troops. The upkeep of these places was charged to the Belgian provinces, which were to contribute for that purpose 1,500,000 florins as an annual subsidy for this purpose. Belgium was thus placed under the guardianship of the maritime powers, and more particularly under that of Holland.

The policy of the Austrian Habsburgs was as disastrous to Belgium as that of the Spanish Habsburgs had been. Charles VI and his successors endeavoured to free themselves from the influence of the maritime powers, but only with the idea of increasing the prestige of their own monarchy. When the Ostend Company was founded (1723) to give the Belgian provinces a share in overseas trade, the Dutch Indian companies, fearing its competition, at once demanded its suppres-

sion and threatened to declare war. Charles VI wished to secure for his eldest daughter her inheritance in its integrity and was obliged, 'for the welfare of Europe', to suspend the Ostend Company for seven years (1727) and ultimately to dissolve it. Belgium was thus left in dependence on the two maritime powers, in order that the emperor might win their support and secure the ratification of the Pragmatic Sanction, regulating the succession to his dominions.

Maria Theresa, however, found that her rights were disputed. The War of the Austrian Succession led to the invasion of Flanders by the armies of Louis XIV in 1744. In the following year, Marshal Saxe, the lieutenant of the French king, utterly defeated the Anglo-Dutch troops at Fontenoy near Tournai, and compelled them to evacuate Flanders. In 1746 Saxe surprised Brussels and defeated Prince Charles of Lorraine, Governor-General of the Low Countries, at Raucoux, north of Liège. All the Belgian provinces, except Limburg and Luxemburg, fell then into his power; they were crushed by contributions of every kind, but were finally restored to Maria Theresa by Louis XV himself, in exchange for colonial concessions to which England agreed. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) did not mention the abolition of the annual subsidy paid to the United Provinces for the maintenance of the barrier, but that abolition followed as a natural result of the policy adopted by the Dutch, who, instead of increasing their forces in the barrier fortresses, withdrew them on the expected approach of a French army at the beginning of the Seven Years' War.

The accession of Joseph II (1780), whom his mother associated with her in the government from 1765 onwards, was the signal for a new orientation of Austrian policy. Taking advantage of the war which the United Provinces were waging against England (1780), the emperor ordered the demolition of the

barrier fortresses; the Dutch garrisons withdrew without offering any opposition. Holland limited herself with a diplomatic protest.

Joseph II also endeavoured to open the Scheldt and so to free Belgium entirely from Dutch tutelage. He ordered two ships to sail, one from Ostend and the other from Antwerp. The first was to ascend the Scheldt, but was stopped at Flushing. The second went down the Scheldt; it passed the forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek without hindrance, but opposite Saftingen a Dutch cutter opened fire upon it and forced it to turn back (1783). France intervened in support of the United Provinces and secured the conclusion of the Treaty of Fontainebleau (1785), which, without mentioning the Barrier Treaty, abrogated it in fact, gave the emperor an indemnity of ten million florins for the abandonment of his sovereign rights over Maastricht, and permitted him to regulate at will the frontier customs duties of the Belgian provinces. But the provinces were not wholly emancipated, since the Scheldt remained closed.

## *ii. Economic Revival*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the economic position of Belgium was extremely depressed. Deprived henceforth of commercial intercourse with Spain, she was completely shut in by the neighbouring powers, and was hardly able to enter into relations with the hereditary dominions of the House of Austria owing to their distance. Belgium, therefore, attempted to find outlets for herself oversea. The initiative in these colonial enterprises was taken by private persons, and they were at first seconded by the central power. Some merchants of Ghent and Ostend secured from the government in 1714 authority to arm vessels 'to carry to the East Indies the merchandise and manufactures of these

provinces'. In the following year the Burgundian flag appeared for the first time in the East Indies. The chief expedition reached Surat, the great commercial city of the Mogul Empire, and, despite the opposition of the Dutch, who held the trading supremacy there, brought back a full cargo of its goods and stuffs. The sale of oriental products secured for the partners in the venture a profit of about a hundred per cent. This brilliant result gave rise to a scheme for the foundation of an East India Company, and the imperial government caused the project to be examined by its Councillor of Commerce, de Castillon. During this time trade with the Indies rapidly increased, thanks to the assistance of a certain number of naturalized foreigners, especially Dutch merchants and English captains. An Austro-Belgian factory was established at Canton and another at Gabelon, on the Coromandel Coast. Finally, in 1722, the government of Vienna, with the support of the chief merchants of Antwerp, founded, under the style of 'the Imperial and Royal Company of the Indies', a chartered company modelled on the similar associations existing in Holland and England. The directors were chosen from the heads of the leading firms of Antwerp and Ghent, and the sales were to take place at Ostend and Bruges. The United Provinces at once made representations to the Austrian government. Charles VI replied to their representative that he wished to maintain a good understanding with the republic, but that, 'the sea being free to all', no one could deprive his subjects of the right of navigating it. The United Provinces induced England and France to join them in demanding the suppression of the Ostend Company. The emperor refused to be intimidated and ordered the charter of the Company to be published (1723). The success of the flotation—the capital was subscribed in two days—still further alarmed the merchants of London and Amsterdam, who forthwith increased their



efforts to secure joint action on the part of their governments. They were so successful that in 1727 the Company, which had in a short space of time attained a vigorous existence, was suspended, and four years later was suppressed.

Although deprived of its factories, and suppressed by formal treaties, the Company actually continued to exist until the close of the Austrian régime. It engaged in various undertakings at home and abroad, and the shareholders long received high dividends. But it was in vain that they pressed Maria Theresa, who succeeded her father in 1740, to compensate them for the losses suffered in the Indies. Maria Theresa, who heaped favours and privileges upon the Adriatic ports, too long neglected Ostend. The trade of that port rapidly developed as soon as war broke out between England and Holland (1780). It profited from that conflict, which paralysed the trade of the two belligerent countries. In 1781 Joseph II, who was particularly interested in economic questions, declared Ostend a free port, and the town soon became the centre of a considerable trade. The population so increased that it was necessary to extend the limits of the commune, to level the walls, and to construct what was really a new city.

Internal trade was favoured by the government, which developed the network of ways of communication. During the reign of Maria Theresa, and under the administration of her brother-in-law, Charles of Lorraine, the central authority exhibited a feverish activity in this respect; the canal from Bruges to Ghent was completed, the first boat from Ostend arriving at Ghent in 1753. Louvain was linked up by a canal, built between 1750 and 1753, to the junction of the Senne and the Dyle. The city increased its trade with the Rhenish districts as a result of the building of a high road from Limburg, by way of Liège and Herve, to Aix-la-Chapelle. Other towns were reached by roads to the great route between Ostend

and Cologne, Menin and Courtrai being thus linked with Bruges, Grammont with Ghent, Nivelles and Namur with Louvain.

The epoch of Maria Theresa also contributed to the revival of industry. The government encouraged the setting up of new manufactures. Its attempts to revive Flemish weaving failed, but, on the other hand, weaving in Limburg attained great prosperity. The cloth industry revived greatly in Flanders and in the district of Tournai, Ghent and Courtrai, with Tournai, becoming its principal centres. The last-named city was the seat of an 'imperial and royal manufactory' (1789) for the dyeing of linen, yarn, and cloth. Equal prosperity attended the carpet industry, the character of which was completely transformed, carpets for the floor being produced in place of hanging tapestries. Antwerp remained the centre of the silk manufacture, in which thousands of hands were engaged. In the eighteenth century the lace industry reached its height, despite French and English competition.

In Hainault and the district of Namur, pottery and glass afforded new sources of wealth; at Tournai a porcelain and crockery factory was set up, while glass factories were created at Charleroi, Gosselies, Ghlin, and Namur. Coal-mining increased in the centre; the exploration of the Charleroi area began. The employment of steam pumps made possible the satisfactory working of the mines (about 1730). The iron trade continued to languish in the Austrian Netherlands, which were in this respect dependent upon the principality of Liège. But at Namur the working of copper was sufficient to make export possible.

Agriculture and cattle-farming benefited even more than industry by the favour of the government. They profited from the more equitable distribution of taxation and from the suppression of abuses connected with the collection of the

revenue. Heaths were cleared; new pasture lands were created, and farming was made more profitable by the development of means of communication.

### *iii. Complete Centralization*

The House of Austria reinvigorated the system of absolute government inaugurated by the Spanish Habsburgs. The Habsburg monarchs, indeed, pursued a personal policy at home and abroad. Inspired by the philosophical theories of the age, they regarded themselves not as only the masters, but as the 'first servants' of the State. They aimed at the promotion of general prosperity, concerning themselves primarily with the economic and social needs of the people, increasing centralization in order to destroy privilege, and thus exercised a new kind of absolutism, the form described as 'enlightened despotism'. They undertook to control in the smallest details the conduct of their representatives in the Belgian provinces, but they were at times ill served by greedy and unscrupulous ministers, such as the Marquis de Prié (1716-25), or men haughty and tactless, such as Belgiojoso (1783-7).

The old privileged corporations did not at first dare to resist the extension of monarchical power. There was only one open revolt; it occurred at the beginning of the reign of Charles VI and was suppressed with severity and with a great display of force. In virtue of their mediaeval privileges, the crafts of Brussels attempted to resist the government and in a way to stop the machine of government by refusing the annual subsidy. It was on this occasion that the Marquis de Prié declared, 'Privileges must be destroyed in this country, or the country will be destroyed by its privileges'.

At the end of the year 1716 one of the syndics of the corporations, Anneessens, a slater and chair manufacturer, with other

heads of crafts, refused to take the oath which had for some years been imposed on them, and demanded the rescinding of all decrees, contrary to their privileges, published during the previous two hundred years. His object was to revert to the system of the fifteenth century. As a former doyen or commander of the 'Great Oath' (military gild), Anneessens wielded vast influence over the burgher militia, and he availed himself of this fact to oppose the government. Disorders broke out, in the course of which the hall of the Council of Brabant was sacked, and the militia either did nothing or were able to do nothing to stop them. The Marquis de Prié ordered prosecutions, after having called in enough troops to maintain order. Anneessens, who had attained the age of fifty-nine, defended himself with remarkable energy, but was sentenced to death for treason. He refused to ask for pardon. The Marquis de Prié, in order to prevent by intimidation a renewal of similar demonstrations, ordered him to be executed. The execution took place in the Grand'Place, where the sumptuous palaces of the corporations recalled the memory of the self-governed communities of the past (1719). Among the burghers and the people of Brussels many mourned Anneessens as a martyr, and the majority of the clergy of that city celebrated his obsequies—which was never done in the case of those sentenced to death. His name soon came to symbolize the love of liberty and was honoured by all the enemies of absolutism. Prié thought that he had 'struck down the republican spirit'; he had at all events acted in conformity with the principle enunciated in these words by Charles VI, 'use fire and sword with persistency till chastisement has produced general submission and obedience'.

There was in actual fact no further serious disturbance in the towns down to the time of the Brabantine Revolution, and the government everywhere increased its influence over



municipal life by nominating magistrates at its pleasure. Louvain, Brussels, Antwerp, Arlon, Malines, and Luxemburg alone retained some elective magistrates. The central power often nullified privileges by pensioning off individuals who were excluded from communal offices. But the actual functions of the municipal magistrates were hardly restricted except in the case of certain 'officials', such as the pensioner or the *greffier*, whose nomination the government reserved for itself.

Provincial exclusiveness, which had developed so greatly under Spanish rule, was systematically broken down by a variety of measures. The competence of the governors was limited; they lost their military and judicial powers, as well as the right of reappointing municipal magistrates and of conferring important offices. This was true of all the provinces except Hainault, where the powerful House of Arenberg monopolized for a long period the office of governor and that of grand bailiff, and preserved a wide ascendancy. The provincial governments were eventually successively abolished, and at the accession of Joseph II (1780) only that of Namur remained.

The instruments of provincial government became more and more the councils of justice and the fiscal bureaux. They inherited some of the functions of the governor. But the councils of Brabant, Hainault, and Guelders, which still exercised certain sovereign rights, such as the grant of tolls and the publication of edicts, saw these powers gradually reduced.

Everywhere the central power insensibly threatened the old constitutional traditions in virtue of which the provinces reserved to their own natives the right of filling provincial offices. But the Brabançons and Limburgers, continuing to exclude foreigners from public office in their respective territories, saw themselves similarly excluded in the other provinces.

The agents of the central power devoted themselves solely

to the work of removing by every means the obstacles which the privileges of corporations or municipalities offered to absolutism; they wished to destroy the last traces of the old provincial privileges. But they were unable to prevent the States of Brabant and Hainault from jealously preserving their financial rights.

From the reign of Charles VI, central institutions were so reorganized as to strengthen the personal action of the sovereign. A special ministry was established at Vienna with the title of 'Supreme Council of the Low Countries'; at a later date, during the reign of Maria Theresa, it was suppressed and incorporated in the 'Chancellery of the Court and State', an entirely Austrian institution. By creating the office of minister plenipotentiary, and by making it practically permanent from 1748 onwards, the sovereign secured a more docile instrument than the governor-general, who, owing to his exalted position—he was normally a prince of the blood—generally acquired a certain measure of independence. The minister plenipotentiary supervised the conduct of the governor-general and acted as his deputy during his absence.

The collateral councils, which had been at first absorbed into a single council, were restored with purely consultative powers and were in actual fact merely honorary bodies. Governmental or 'joint' commissions were substituted for them, to deal with special questions, strictly defined, and even with questions which were of old within the competence of the provincial States. The government, however, could not deprive the estates of the right to vote the taxes. It claimed that these bodies could not refuse grants, but were empowered only to decide their incidence. It laboured to suppress illegal exemptions.

In the judicial sphere, the royal authority devoted itself to the regulation and reformation of repressive institutions

in the light of the humanitarian theories which were then in vogue. As early as 1765 it consulted the courts of justice on the subject of the abolition of torture and of the punishment of branding.

It further frequently prevented the use of the 'question', and prohibited the use of torture by courts martial first of all. Some years later Joseph II abolished it in the case of ordinary tribunals (1784). The penal code was gradually modified. The government also founded the system of houses of correction ('maisons de force') for vagabonds and idlers, in which the prisoners were compelled to work. That of Ghent was opened in 1776, and that of Vilvorde in 1779.

During the latter years of the reign of Maria Theresa education was to a great extent secularized by passing under the control of the government. The suppression of the Society of Jesus, decreed in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV, enabled the Austrian government to make use of the former Jesuit colleges and to reorganize secondary education according to the plans of a 'royal commission on studies'. A part of the teaching staff continued as before to be selected from among the clergy, and the bishops had the right to inspect the Theresian colleges.

The University of Louvain, which still enjoyed a large amount of self-government, but had fallen into extreme decay, was also brought under the exclusive control of the government. An imperial commissary, Count Nény, was given the chief supervision of the establishment in 1755. He initiated a number of measures and regulations designed to raise the educational tone and to revive discipline. New chairs were established, including one of public law. A university press was created by imperial grant.

The Theresian epoch was characterized by a real revival of learning. The government devoted itself to its support; it

erected among other institutions at Brussels an official literary society (1769), which became three years later 'the Imperial and Royal Academy'. This institution assisted the spread of the works of men of science. In its *Memoirs* there appeared learned dissertations on mathematics, physics, botany, and chemistry. Minkelers published in them his studies on the application of coal-gas for lighting purposes.

The centralizing policy of Austrian absolutism made itself felt in every sphere of social activity. If it accomplished its aims slowly, and if it suffered occasional checks, this was due to the fact that the very structure of society was essentially opposed to it, having preserved in a very marked degree its archaic individualism, thus retaining also its old character, even down to the middle of the eighteenth century, despite the energetic efforts of the central government.

The clergy constantly maintained their pre-eminence, despite the successive restrictions of their political privileges effected by the central government. The nobles kept considerable power in the rural districts, owing to their landed wealth and their prestige, and continued to despise commerce and industry, although compelled to admit into their ranks certain merchant princes such as Cloots (Baron de Schilde). The rôle of the nobility remained essentially rural; moreover, they generally held aloof from the government. The 'official aristocracy' was strengthened and formed a kind of new order, while the central authority laboured to suppress class privileges. Among other institutions it gained control over the magistracies of the chief towns, the members of which were the sole representatives of the third estate in the provincial states, forming in reality a privileged order and often making common cause with the two other orders in resisting the government. In the large towns, more especially in those of Brabant, the lesser *bourgeoisie* still retained a corporate organization, which



assured certain privileges and monopolies, and formed with the artisans a third estate.

The majority of the workmen were still excluded from the corporate organizations owing to the constant growth of manufactures and the exclusiveness of the artisans, inclusion in the number of whom became more and more difficult owing to the system of long apprenticeship, heavy admission fees, and costly specimen pieces of work. The great mass of the population—the inhabitants of the small towns, workmen and peasants—remained without political influence, being entirely outside the social organism, from which it became more and more divorced during the eighteenth century. Its ignorance contrasted with the culture of the higher classes.

The culture was essentially French, a circumstance explained by the fact that at this time the language and civilization of France were renowned throughout Europe. Latin with difficulty maintained itself as the learned tongue, and was confined to a great extent to the sphere of higher education, French taking its place in secondary education, that is, the education of the governing classes. French influence was so preponderant in all spheres of intellectual activity that Belgian writers and artists lost all originality, all individuality, overcome as they were by the prestige of France. Painters, sculptors, and architects did no more than imitate their southern colleagues. The styles of Louis XV and of Louis XVI flourished more in Belgium than elsewhere; the productivity of Belgian artists was very limited, and it may be said that in the eighteenth century the country lost one of the chief national characteristics, its artistic skill.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that the ideas of the French philosophers and economists easily permeated Belgium. They, however, found few adherents there, as compared with the principality of Liège. This fact may be

attributed to the reforming tendencies of the sovereigns, who pursued the policy of enlightened despotism, and to the inveterate localism of the Belgian provinces, in which mediaeval ideas were preserved.

The majority of the reforms favoured by French writers were designed to suppress privileges and social inequalities, and seemed to the Belgians bound to strengthen the central power. The policy advocated was that of the sovereigns themselves, who, in applying such reforms, endeavoured to destroy the abuses of the old system based upon privilege and monopoly. In Belgium the old system was opposed only by a small minority of educated men, great merchants, industrial leaders, advocates and doctors, supporters of the sovereignty of the nation. They gave little help, however, to the central power when open war was declared between it and the privileged classes.

## *The Brabantine Revolution. The United States of Belgium (1789-90)*

### *i. The Josephist Reforms*

DURING the reigns of Charles VI and Maria Theresa, the reforms of those monarchs had already offended a section of the privileged classes. As has already been mentioned, the lesser *bourgeoisie* and the clergy honoured the memory of Anneessens as that of a martyr of despotism. Moreover, the violent measures often adopted by the Austrian government further displeased the mass of the Belgian people, who, as a diplomatist of the end of the seventeenth century remarked, were 'docile enough, provided that they were mildly and reasonably governed, and would meekly follow those who guided them, but would resist those who attempted to drive them by force'. Joseph II exhibited little tact and common sense in directly attacking the historic traditions and institutions of the privileged orders. Breaking absolutely with the past, he attempted by a series of decrees to impose reforms, inspired by rational and humanitarian principles, but regarded as destructive of the fabric of society. Regarding philosophy as 'the legislator of his empire', he fancied that if he could change institutions in accordance with reason and humanity, he would thereby destroy abuses and transform society in accordance with these principles. His aim was to make the State alone, to the exclusion of the Church, the basis of the social edifice, and he therefore endeavoured to restrict ecclesiastical power and subordinate it to secular authority. In his opinion, religious unity was no longer necessary to the State, whereas unity of authority was necessary.

In the course of a journey which he had made in Belgium (1781), shortly after his accession to the throne, he had noted a certain number of abuses, anomalies, and irregularities in the administration and in justice, and he attributed them to the continued privileges still enjoyed by the three orders, clergy, nobles, and third estate. Hence came his desire definitely to suppress privilege in order to establish the reign of equality. On the other hand, under the influence of the doctrines of the 'philosophers' and economists of the period, he considered it to be the function of a government to guide the whole of society with a view to promoting the general well-being. For this purpose, he wished to avail himself of all the energies and all the support of his people without distinction of party, class, or religious belief. One of his first acts, after the death of Maria Theresa, was to proclaim toleration or, as he expressed it, 'liberty of belief' (1781). By a series of edicts, he then attempted to bring the Church under the control of the State, or at least to restrict its action upon society so as to make it co-operate in the pursuit of his ideal. He revived the regulations of Philip II as to the publication of papal bulls and decrees, which were valid only if they received the royal *placet*. He forbade the religious orders to maintain relations with their foreign superiors without the authorization of the government, secularized marriage, suppressed such convents as he regarded as 'useless', that is, those of the purely contemplative orders, and prohibited pilgrimages on the ground that they led to disorders. Finally, in imitation of his policy in his hereditary dominions, he replaced the episcopal seminaries by two seminaries under government control—a principal seminary at Louvain and a branch at Luxemburg (1786). Although he was ready to leave the episcopate the supervision and inspection of the new seminaries, this measure aroused vigorous discontent among the clergy, a discontent which found expression in the



revolt of the students at Louvain. The edict relating to *kermesses*, published in the same year, aroused a certain excitement among the masses, because it fixed all these local festivities to take place on the second Sunday after Easter, with the object of reducing the excesses by which they were accompanied. In the mind of the emperor these measures had no anti-clerical tendency. Deeply pious, Joseph II was much attached to the Church, but, like his mother, Maria Theresa, and his predecessors, Charles V and Philip II, he wished to limit the activity of the clergy to purely religious matters, and believed that he did not err in his duty to the Church by interfering with her external organization.

In 1787 Joseph II turned the whole administrative and judicial system upside down by separating entirely administrative from judicial functions and by replacing the old courts of justice and the courts of the *échevins* by a complete series of new institutions ; each province or ' circle ' was to be administered by an intendant, and a judicial organization of three degrees (tribunals of first instance ; council of appeal ; supreme council) was to be established.

The governors-general (Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen and the Archduchess Maria Christina, sister of the emperor) were unable to calm the agitation which now broke out. An advocate of Brussels, Henry Van der Noot, formed at Brussels a corps of volunteers, ostensibly to maintain order, really to organize the forces of the malcontents. This example was followed in several other towns. The governors-general on their own responsibility suspended the more unpopular edicts and went in person to Vienna to explain the dangers of the situation to the emperor. Joseph demanded that in the first place all revolutionary measures, such as the institution of the armed volunteers, should be abandoned. When these ' indispensable preliminaries ' had been accepted, he would agree to the

suppression of the edicts contrary to provincial and urban privileges, with the implication that the edicts dealing with ecclesiastical matters should be maintained.

Meanwhile, Van der Noot plotted against the government in alliance with a party in the States of Brabant ; he exhausted the funds of the province on propaganda and secured for himself from the heads of some of the Brussels gilds the title of plenipotentiary of the Brabançon people. In this capacity he addressed himself to England, Holland, and France in order to secure the intervention of those powers. He proposed the conversion of the Belgian provinces into a federation analogous to that of the United Provinces, or even the fusion of the two federations. In general he met with no support, but the Prussian government promised to act energetically in favour of the revolutionaries. Van der Noot trusted to such diplomatic promises and neglected to make military preparation for his meditated revolt. This was the work of Vonck, another Brussels advocate, leader of the progressive party, equally hostile to the Austrian government, but advocating equality and the sovereignty of the people. Vonck did not share Van der Noot's confidence in diplomacy, which, he said, would be ' the extinguisher of the revolution '.

### *ii. The Brabantine or ' Belgian ' Revolution*

The winter of 1788-9 was peculiarly severe ; famine and misery contributed to increase the distress of the people and to pave the way for disturbances. At the end of January, the States of Hainault having refused the subsidy demanded, an imperial edict annulled the fundamental charter of the province. In June the States of Brabant expressed their vigorous disapproval of the reforms of the Emperor, and Joseph presently annulled the ' Joyous Entry ', which he had, through his representatives, the governors-general, sworn

to observe. The States thereupon regarded themselves as released from the oath of fealty which they had themselves taken to the emperor. Joseph II sent General d'Alton with troops to meet any eventuality. The leaders of the opposition left the country, Van der Noot taking refuge at Breda and Vonck in the principality of Liège. Vonck gathered a small army and found a leader for it in General Van der Mersch. His expectations as to the value of Prussian promises were realized; at this decisive moment, the government of Berlin invited the Belgians to conduct their revolution for themselves and postponed the sending of assistance to the following spring. Van der Noot published a *Manifesto of the Brabançon People*, represented by 'the estate of the clergy and the third member (the crafts) of the three chief cities, in conjunction with many members of the nobility'. This manifesto declared Joseph II to be deprived of his sovereign rights on the ground of his oppressive acts. The forces of the 'Patriots' marched boldly upon Turnhout and there dispersed the Austrian army. At Ghent the insurrection was aggravated by disorders, pillage, incendiarism, and violence, to which the imperialists gave themselves up; they were forced to evacuate the town after four days. The 'four days of Ghent' led to the hurried departure of the governors-general and the withdrawal of all the imperial troops into Luxemburg.

On December 18 Van der Noot made his solemn entry into Brussels, accompanied by his secretary, the canon penitentiary Van Eupen. The States of Brabant declared themselves sovereign states, and this example was followed by those of the other provinces. On January 7, 1790, the deputies of all these estates assembled in a national congress, which was national only in name, since it only represented the Belgian provinces as in their relation to external powers. It had cognizance only of foreign affairs and military organization. Each

province formed a distinct state, entirely autonomous. The congress declared that the provinces should form a federation under the title of *United States of Belgium*, and that in every state the old system of privileges should be completely restored. The only innovation introduced by Van der Noot was to add to the members of the States of Brabant himself, his secretary, and some of the heads of the corporations of Louvain and Brussels. The Vonckists energetically protested by publishing libels and pamphlets against the omnipotence of the 'Lords States', and by demanding that the whole nation should be consulted and select a national assembly to give Belgium a new constitution.

Brussels and the great towns were now torn by internal struggles. Clubs and 'oaths' (military corporations) were divided into two camps—the Vonckists, and the Statists or partisans of Van der Noot. The latter demanded the removal of Van der Mersch, a friend of Vonck. The Vonckists provoked riots at Brussels, where the cry resounded, 'Down with the Sovereign States! Long live the sovereignty of the people!' Vonck and forty of his adherents were then proscribed by Van der Noot, who roused the mob against them and allowed the houses of his opponents to be sacked. Vonck took refuge in France, while Van der Mersch was thrown into prison and replaced by the Prussian general, Schönfeld. The defective armament and equipment of the patriot troops, combined with the failure of the promised support, obliged this general, who was also lacking both in forethought and decision, to retreat when the Austrians assumed the offensive.

### *iii. The Austrian Restoration*

Prussian intervention was limited to diplomatic action, in which she was joined by the United Provinces and England. By the Convention of Reichenbach (1790) she assured the



re-establishment of the authority of the Austrian House in Belgium in return for a promise, given by Leopold, who had succeeded Joseph II, that he would restore the institutions of the Belgian provinces and grant an amnesty to the rebels. Leopold then sent an ultimatum to the congress, which answered by proclaiming his third son, the Archduke Charles, hereditary grand duke. The emperor was not satisfied by this half measure. His troops rapidly captured Namur and Brussels, and on December 2, 1790, he was master of the whole country. He restored the system of government which had existed under Maria Theresa. As an eminent historian has said, 'to safeguard his authority, he counted upon the interest that the two parties had in rallying to his government', the Statists because he confirmed their privileges, and the Vonckists because he continued to carry on the work of his predecessors in the direction of equality.

Joseph II, who had been painfully affected by the Brabantine Revolution, and had broken down as a result of the fatigues which he had undergone in the Turkish war, died without realizing the mistakes which he had made. 'A general insanity seems to be affecting all peoples,' he said to Count de Ségur. 'The people of Brabant, for example, have revolted against me because I wished to give them that which your people are loudly demanding.'

*The District of Liège from the Sixteenth Century to  
the Revolution of 1789*

*i. Growth of Absolutism*

As the result of its character of ecclesiastical principality, the district of Liège maintained a certain connexion with the Empire. Maximilian had attached it to the circle of Westphalia, but in actual fact its distinct character was more securely guaranteed than that of the other Belgian provinces after Philip II had reduced them to the position of a distant possession of Spain. It remained a species of republic which strengthened its independence by proclaiming its perpetual neutrality and which thus freed itself from the protectorate exercised over it by the rulers of the Netherlands. It became a real land of refuge and liberty, and in this respect it may be said that the principality of Liège was the most Belgian of all the provinces which united in the nineteenth century to form the kingdom of Belgium. If its bishops sometimes drew close to the Spanish or Austrian Habsburgs, in order to increase or to restore their own authority, the people of Liège themselves generally showed hostility to the Habsburgs, and often made common cause with the opponents of the absolutist system in the Catholic Low Countries.

The gilds of the city favourably received the overtures made to them by the States-General of the Netherlands in the time of Don John, and, in agreement with the whole population of the district, compelled the bishop, Gerard de Groesbeck, to observe a policy of neutrality (1577). His successor, Ernest of Bavaria, however, elected by the chapter because he was a member of one of the most Catholic families in Europe,

showed himself devoted to Spain, although he did not dare openly to abandon the neutrality of Liège. Nothing else could have been expected from a prelate who held, in conjunction with the bishopric of Liège, the archbishopric of Cologne, and who was so much a stranger to his subjects that he could hardly speak French. Even some of his own partisans were scandalized by his 'barbarous pride'.

The divorce between the prince-bishop and the city was accentuated by the brilliant economic growth of Liège. While the Catholic Netherlands saw their prosperity vanishing, the principality entered upon a period of vigorous commercial life and intense industry. The 'city' of Liège yearly contained a larger population of smiths and armourers. Its collieries increased in number and a series of suburbs arose all round its walls. Factories, charcoal, and blast furnaces further increased the prosperity of the area between the Sambre and the Meuse, while to the east of Liège the district of Franchimont was full of ever-active forges. In the Vesdre valley, the manufacture of the cloths of Verviers developed more and more rapidly, and by the second half of the seventeenth century these goods were exported even to the Indies.

The growing fortune of the city and of the good towns favoured their independence, and the two burgomasters of Liège became the most important personages in the principality. At the beginning of the seventeenth century a foreign observer remarked that 'the burgomasters are more sovereigns than is the prince'. The prince-bishops had thus much difficulty in introducing the absolutist system. Ferdinand of Bavaria, nephew and successor of Ernest and, like him, also Archbishop of Cologne, wished in 1613 to abolish the democratic government of the city. This measure was stigmatized as a despotic attack upon the right of the people, and the bishop was forced to suspend its operation. France and the United

Provinces profited from this conflict and secretly supported the republicans of Liège against the prince, who was the ally of the House of Austria, and appealed for help to the Cardinal Infant Ferdinand, Governor-General of the Low Countries. In the principality, his only supporters were drawn from the ranks of the 'Chiroux', or aristocrats. The democrats, nicknamed the 'Grignoux' by their opponents, on their side invoked the aid of Richelieu, to whom the democratic burgo-master, La Ruelle, addressed an urgent demand for assistance to save the liberty and neutrality of Liège, threatened by Spanish brutality. But La Ruelle was murdered (1637) by Spanish soldiers, treacherously introduced into the city by a traitor, the Count de Warfusée, who after serving the King of Spain and the United Provinces, wished to gain the favour of the Houses of Bavaria and Austria. The fury of the people led them to all kinds of excesses. To restore tranquillity, Ferdinand of Bavaria was forced to reaffirm the neutrality of Liège, and to declare that the principality, while remaining 'under the wing, fealty, and obedience of the Holy Empire', should be exempt from all contributions, except in event of war against the Turks.<sup>1</sup> The bishop took his revenge after the Treaties of Munster and Westphalia (1648), which reconciled Spain with the United Provinces and France. Henceforward those states had no motive for intervening in the principality, and the

<sup>1</sup> Despite its neutrality, the territory of the principality of Liège was specially ravaged by the French armies during the war with Holland (1672-8). Many towns and villages were pillaged. Tongres, having refused admission to the foreign troops, was taken by assault and sacked for three days (1672). The citadel of Liège was sold to the French king by Baron de Vierset, its governor. It was destroyed in 1673. Tongres was scarcely rebuilt before it was burned by Louvois. The principality of Liège was also invaded by the allies and suffered more from the war than did the Spanish provinces. The same is true of later wars, notably the War of the Spanish Succession.



authority of the prince was restored. Between 1649 and 1684 five burgomasters mounted the scaffold. Finally, Maximilian Henry of Bavaria imposed on the city and the good towns the regulation of 1684, which greatly increased the influence of the prince in the choice of members of the magistracy. Despite the growth of princely power, the actual form of the mediaeval institutions was unchanged; everything continued to be formally conducted upon a dual basis, the prince and the 'sense of the country'.

During the eighteenth century, the theories of the French philosophers found many disciples in the country of Liège. There the prerogatives of the prince and the privileges of the clergy appeared to be exorbitant; criticism was especially directed against special ecclesiastical jurisdictions and clerical exemptions from imposts. Numerous books and journals carried on an active propaganda in favour of new doctrines inspired by an ideal of liberty and equality, and a club was established at Liège under the name 'Society of Emulation' (1779). The censorship was so powerless to prevent the publication of subversive writings that in 1771 the works of Voltaire (with a false imprint) issued from the presses of Liège.

## *ii. The Revolution of Liège*

In contrast to the Austrian Netherlands, in the country of Liège absolutism was favoured by the support of the privileged classes and found a powerful ally in the chapter of Saint-Lambert, the mediaeval prerogatives of which had remained unimpaired and had even been extended. From the end of the seventeenth century, the chapter nominated a patron<sup>1</sup> at each vacancy in the see; instead of summoning the States according to ancient usage. After the regulation of 1684 the

<sup>1</sup> *Mambour.*

princes found means of making the 'sense of the country' a mere instrument in their hands: in agreement with the chapter, they reduced the number of the delegates of the estate of the nobles. Moreover, since they controlled the communal magistracies, the third estate in actual fact represented only the party devoted to the central power, a party which was small in numbers, especially at Liège, where the *bourgeoisie* and the workmen aspired to throw off 'the yoke of the priests'. Absolutism, in short, appeared there in a theocratic form, and it was owing to this fact that the writings of the school of Voltaire met with so much success in the principality.

The accession of Hoensbroeck in 1784 exasperated the opponents of absolutism. Educated for the priesthood at Notre-Dame of Aix-la-Chapelle, the new bishop, a man of austere piety and of a most obstinate character, had grown up in an atmosphere into which the philosophic movement had not penetrated. From the very first he showed his intention of maintaining the old régime and of relying entirely upon the support of the aristocratic party. When, in 1785, a merchant of Liège, named Levoz, wished to open a casino at Spa near that which already existed, the proprietor of the older establishment appealed to the grant from the prince conceding to him a monopoly of the gaming tables and resisted the opening of the new hall. Levoz then applied to the privy council of the bishop, with the object of proving that the monopoly in question was irregular, as having been arbitrarily granted by the prince without the advice of the 'sense of the country'. The affair, at first trifling, assumed such importance that the Imperial Chamber of Wetzlar, to which Levoz appealed, ordered the appellant by decree to obey the edicts of the prince, and Hoensbroeck proceeded at once to close forcibly Levoz's club, a step regarded by his partisans as a violation of a private residence. The number of the supporters

of Levoz increased in proportion to the increasingly arbitrary conduct of the prince: after the severe winter of 1788-9, which produced actual famine, Hoensbroeck issued a series of decrees merely with the agreement of the chapter and without the advice of representatives of the States.

The news of the taking of the Bastille aroused great enthusiasm in the whole country of Liège, and especially in the city and the district of Franchimont (Verviers and its neighbourhood). Newspapers and pamphlets celebrated the event as the prelude to the overthrow of 'theocratic despotism' and vigorously demanded the abolition of the hated regulation of 1684 and the summoning of the States. Hoensbroeck promised to grant the latter demand, but declared his absolute resolve to maintain the system of 1684.

Anti-absolutist demonstrations increased, and on August 17, 1789, there appeared in the streets of the city the red and yellow colours of Liège and the green and white of Franchimont. Next day the leaders of the insurrection met at the town hall as a 'committee charged with the formation of a municipal generalty'. On the same day a new magistracy was proclaimed by the crowd gathered in the market-place, and the bishop, summoned to the town hall from his chateau of Seraing, approved this election. Wearing the cockade of Liège, he signed the abrogation of the regulation of 1684. But some days later, he secretly left the principality and appealed to the Imperial Chamber of Wetzlar to decree that the measures necessary for the restoration of his authority should be taken. The Chamber at once gave him satisfaction, and charged the princes of the circle of Westphalia with the execution of its sentence. Among these was included the King of Prussia, Frederic William II, in his capacity of Duke of Cleves. The agent of this monarch, whose sole desire was to embarrass the court of Austria, the protector of the bishop, had encouraged

the patriots of Liège in their opposition. Many of the promoters of the revolution, such as Fabry, an ex-mayor who had been removed from his office without cause by the prince, fancied that the Prussian king would act as mediator, and made representations at Berlin in this sense. For a time it appeared possible that this mediation would be carried into effect. The troops, mainly Prussian, who occupied the citadel (November 30, 1789), in actual fact took no steps to enforce the execution of the sentence of the Imperial Chamber. The chapter persistently opposed the smallest concession, and supported Hoensbroeck in his uncompromising attitude. After that the King of Prussia recalled his troops (April 16, 1790) and the chapter at once withdrew to Aix-la-Chapelle. The States of Liège, elected according to the system existing prior to 1684, then proclaimed the deposition of Hoensbroeck, and selected Ferdinand de Rohan, Archbishop of Cambrai, as patron of the principality. This was a defiance to the German princes, charged with the restoration of Hoensbroeck, and among them, to the King of Prussia, whose attitude now changed entirely. He had accepted the proposals of the court of Vienna with regard to a second partition of Poland, made on condition that he abandoned the rebels of Belgium and Liège to the discretion of the emperor. The Imperial Chamber of Wetzlar then entrusted the execution of its decision to the emperor, in his capacity of head of the circle of Burgundy.

On their side, the Liégeois, abandoned to their own resources, submitted themselves to 'the supreme will of the Emperor'. The entry of the 'Kaiserlicks' into Liège (January 12, 1791) marked the return to the *ancien régime* and the triumph of reaction. From that moment, many of the patriots of Liège turned their eyes towards France; their chief club, the 'Patriotic Society', founded in 1785, became in 1790 the 'Society of the Friends of Liberty'. Accordingly Dumouriez,



after his victory at Jemappes, was received as a liberator (November 28, 1792). His plan for uniting Liège and the Belgian provinces into one nation found considerable support among the moderates, but the extremists, as generally happens in revolutionary times, carried the day and secured the triumph of the idea of reunion with France. That country found in the district of Liège some great admirers, such as the composer Grétry, who bought Jean-Jacques Rousseau's hermitage at Montmorency, and himself exercised great influence on the country of his adoption by regenerating music there. One of the songs which he composed, *Mourons pour la patrie*, accompanied the *Marseillaise* in the wars of the Revolution and of the Empire.

## *Belgium under French Rule (1792-1814)*

### *i. The French Conquest (1792-4)*

THE first act of the great struggle between revolutionary France and the conservative monarchies took place mainly in Belgium. When the 'National Assembly' had declared war upon the Emperor Francis II, who was openly planning a counter-revolutionary campaign (April 20, 1792), three French armies invaded Belgium, the most vulnerable part of the Austrian dominions. But they were at once repulsed. Thanks to Dumouriez a new attempt was made; the republican armies, joined by a Belgian legion, gained the victory of Jemappes (November 6), which opened Belgium to them. Dumouriez then issued a proclamation to the Belgians, which had been previously approved by the Convention, and in which he declared that his soldiers were coming 'as allies and as brothers'. On November 14 he entered Brussels, the magistrates of which city, according to custom, brought to him the keys of the place. He refused them, saying, 'Keep the keys yourselves and keep them carefully. Let no foreigner rule you any more, for you are not made for such a fate. . . .' Soon afterwards he entered the principality of Liège, where he was welcomed with enthusiasm. Meanwhile a French squadron ascended the Scheldt to Antwerp, in pursuance of a decree of the executive council of the republic which had proclaimed the freedom of the Scheldt and Meuse.

The disappearance of the Belgian barrier alarmed England, which had broken off diplomatic relations with France after the Tenth of August, and the campaign of Dumouriez in Holland

determined the great maritime power to draw closer to Austria and to assist her in the reconquest of Belgium. The allied forces inflicted on the army of Dumouriez, which was inferior to them numerically, the defeat of Neerwinden, east of Tirlémont (March 3, 1793), and soon reoccupied the whole country. But the Austrian restoration did not last long. Francis II was little interested in Belgium, which he wished to exchange for Bavaria, and he offered only a slight resistance to the French armies which attacked the provinces in 1794. Jourdan, at the head of the army of the Sambre and Meuse, captured Charleroi and then gained the victory of Fleurus (June 26). The Austrians at once evacuated the country. Pichegru occupied Flanders and joined Jourdan at Brussels. Antwerp surrendered without offering any defence, and the same thing happened at Liège, where a part of the people joined the conquerors in order to expel the Austrians (July 27, 9 Thermidor).

## *ii. Military Occupation and Annexation (1794-9)*

The conquest of Belgium was accomplished at the moment when the Reign of Terror ended in France, but it was only recognized by Francis II three years later, at the Treaty of Campo Formio (1797). In the interval it was completed by the annexation of Flemish Zealand and Flushing, which were ceded by Holland. The Committee of Public Safety treated Belgium as a conquered country. It entrusted to commissaries, entitled representatives of the people, the task of imposing contributions and of making requisitions for the maintenance of the army. These commissaries inflicted upon the nobles, the clergy, and the other privileged classes in Brussels a tax of five million livres, and they treated other towns in a similar manner. The Convention was resolved to reimburse itself for the expenses of the campaign of 1792. The system of requisitions was brutally applied and produced

ruin and desolation, more especially in the country districts. Whole communes were handed over to pillage. Business transactions ceased entirely as a result of the introduction of the 'maximum' and the assignats. The scarcity reached such a pitch that recourse was had to a census of all provisions and the issue of bread cards. The hard winter of 1794-5, which made it possible for Pichegru to conduct a campaign in Holland on the ice, still further increased the calamities of the country.

Hainault, which at the very beginning had been transformed into the department of Jemappes, was forced to submit to the same system of government, as was the district of Liège, which had voted for reunion with France. Despite the numerous complaints of the Belgians, the situation was only improved in a slight degree during the year 1795.

The country was then divided into nine departments, which were designated the 'reunited departments'.<sup>1</sup> From October 1, 1795, the date on which annexation was voted by the Convention, all French laws were henceforth applicable to Belgium, but the Committee of Public Safety controlled their application so that the principles which had inspired the French Revolution were modified in Belgium by the administrative centralization or by the military rule. In place of granting to the people the free choice of their officials, the government commissaries intervened without compunction in the elections, and imposed the election of such officials as they approved. The sovereignty of the people was no more than an empty phrase.

On the other hand, the principle of equality was much better applied. All the old provincial, local, or municipal

<sup>1</sup> The various departments, with their capitals, were: Lys, capital Bruges; Escaut, Ghent; Deux-Nèthes, Antwerp; Meuse-inférieure, Maastricht; Ourthe, Liège; Forêts, Luxemburg; Sambre-et-Meuse, Namur; Jemappes, Mons; and Dyle, Brussels.



institutions vanished, since they were based upon privilege. Collective or individual exemptions from taxation were abolished, as were the tithes and the *corvées*. All citizens were liable to the same taxes, which were imposed by their representatives. Civil equality involved religious equality. All citizens, to whatever religion they belonged, were 'equally eligible for all dignities, offices, and public employments, according to their capacity, and without any distinctions other than those created by their virtues and ability'. The principle of equality further involved the suppression of the sale of offices, by which a monopoly had been created in favour of the wealthy. In civil life the rule of succession was entirely transformed; primogeniture—that is, the rule by which the eldest male succeeded, to the exclusion of all other children, to the whole of his parents' property—was abolished. The result was a speedy division of large properties and a corresponding decline in the influence of the nobility. The application of the principle of civil equality deprived the clergy of the care of registers of births, marriages, and deaths; since non-Catholics were in future on the same level as other citizens, it was necessary to entrust the business of registration to civil authorities and especially to the municipalities. Finally all the customary laws, which had been so complicated and which had varied from province to province and even from town to town, were replaced by 'a general code of simple laws', which was only completed under the Consulate and eventually received the name of the Code Napoléon. This unity of legislation was accomplished, with very beneficial results.

In virtue of the principle that the law should be equal for all, the new penal code completed the work of Joseph II: torture and uselessly cruel punishments were abolished, together with the penalty of confiscation which affected the family of the delinquent. Arbitrary imprisonment was forbidden.

All institutions were not merely regulated but were also completely transformed as a result of the separation of powers (legislative, executive, and judicial). The tribunals no longer formed, as they had done under the *ancien régime*, bodies at once administrative and judicial (the sheriffs were replaced by mere municipal officers). The judicial organization resembled that which Joseph II had in vain attempted to introduce—justices of the peace, correctional tribunals, tribunals of first instance, courts of appeal, court of cassation. The administrative system exhibited an equal care for simplicity and uniformity, the communes being grouped into cantons, the cantons into districts, and the districts into departments.

The Directory, which exercised the executive power after October 27, 1795, imposed extraordinary contributions upon Belgium, alleging in excuse that it ought to contribute to the cost of the 'war of liberation'. It then proceeded to apply to Belgium the French fiscal system, by which the charges on the various districts were increased, more especially on the former country of Liège. In striking at the 'citizens in easy circumstances', the Directory struck a dual blow; it attacked the privileged classes and it 'bled' them for the profit of the government. Rigorous measures were employed to recover arrears: the military and the gendarmes employed force against the recalcitrant. The Directory was, moreover, ill served by unscrupulous agents, who regarded their missions as giving them the right to irritate and pillage—freebooters in a hurry to make their fortune, men of tarnished reputation, low-born Jacobins. The general result was a shameless exploitation both of the property of the State and of that of private persons.

The government at first had recourse to less violent means in order to deprive the clergy by law of the social functions which they had exercised in the past. In 1797 it issued orders for the

suppression of all religious establishments not maintaining schools or hospitals; their lands were sold, but it allowed the suppression of the religious houses to proceed gradually, and in reality many convents, affected by the law, were tolerated in practice. Religious persecution began only with the Jacobin *coup d'état* of 18 Fructidor, Year IV (1797). Then the University of Louvain was closed despite the complaints of the municipality (1797), and at the same time congregations were dispersed, and an oath of fidelity to the republican régime and of 'hatred for royalty and monarchy' was imposed on the priests. The Directory forbade the external signs of religion, images and the cross, and proscribed ecclesiastical dress. It caused a list of priests who had not taken the oath to be drawn up, and expelled or deported a certain number of these, although the majority hid themselves with success.

If the Directory had been assured of the help of the municipal and departmental authorities elected by the Belgians, it would have been able to soften the transition from the old to the new order. But its commissaries removed a large number of the members of the municipalities or of the councils of the departments (central administrations), accusing them of bad citizenship and harrying them by all manner of means, by espionage, delation, &c. It is not surprising that public opinion showed itself refractory; the revolutionary fêtes were received with little favour, excepting the anniversary of 9 Thermidor, which was converted into a manifestation against Jacobin tyranny. As for the Republican calendar, the government failed to secure its adoption despite the coercive measures which it employed to secure the observance of the tenth day holiday.

The wealthier classes, such as the aristocracy and the clergy, had not borne without complaint the execution of the oppressive measures directed against them by the government of

the Directory. But their opposition did not develop into insurrectionary movements. In their turn the rural classes were especially affected by the decree of the Directory ordering a large levy of militia to meet the prospect of war which grew constantly more threatening (1798). The law of conscription called to the colours all citizens between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, but it had not been applied to Belgium owing to the fear that it would provoke risings analogous to those of La Vendée.

The first manifestations of resistance on the part of the conscripts occurred in the district of Waas, where they were dispersed by the gendarmes. But the agitation spread from district to district and bands of young men cut down the trees of liberty, destroyed the registers of the civil state, on which conscription was based, and molested the officials who were known to be attached to the government. The insurrection spread most widely in the Campine. The rebels attacked Malines in order to cut the communications between Antwerp and Brussels, but were repulsed. The tocsin sounded in almost every part of Flanders; the peasants armed themselves with muskets, pistols, or swords—such as they possessed; many had only forks or clubs. The troops sent against these ‘brigands’, as they were termed by the agents of the Directory, dispersed them and proceeded to a general hunt, a domiciliary visitation of the houses in the insurgent villages. The repression was pitiless; bands of peasants surprised in the suburbs of Turnhout fell back on Herenthals, where they attempted a defence; the little town was carried by assault and set on fire by the troops. Other bands concentrated on Diest and then on Hasselt, where they hastily repaired the old fortifications of the place. For almost a whole day they withstood the attack of the soldiery, but eventually retreated after suffering heavy losses. This defeat marked the end of this ‘peasants’ war’.



which gave to Henri Conscience the inspiration for one of his most moving romances.

This insurrection, which was attributed by the Directory to the 'intrigues of the priests', formed the pretext for a series of oppressive measures directed against the clergy and the practice of the Catholic faith. It ordered the bells of the churches to be taken down, broken up, and the metal sold to the Creusot works. Lists of those priests who had not taken the required oath were drawn up and large numbers of them were deported. Of these many were sent to the Isle of Ré; others were dispatched to Guiana, where they fell victims to the 'dry guillotine', as the fever was called. Many of the parish priests escaped the search for them, lying hid in the houses of their compatriots, but a large number of parishes were deprived of their pastors, and it was in these places that there were held 'blind masses', that is, masses celebrated in the absence of an officiating priest.

During more than a year, Belgium was placed under a régime of exception. The Directory and its agents devised various means of terrorizing the country: military occupation of places, deportation of hostages, fines and exactions of money. The troops gave themselves up to such excesses that their mere approach was often enough to produce a general panic in the villages. The administration was entirely arbitrary; the communes through which the bands of peasants had passed were held responsible for the spread of the revolt, and the very areas which had been most wasted were condemned to pay the heaviest fines. Finally a fresh purgation of the municipal and departmental councils was undertaken and the elections ordered. In general the commissaries of the Directory acted as veritable tyrants; under the pretext of 'regenerating' institutions, they prolonged beyond all reason the régime of the conquest.

*iii. The Napoleonic Government (1799-1814)*

The *coup d'état* of 18 Brumaire (November 9, 1799) was received in Belgium with indifference. Expectation that the French control of the country would be of brief duration prevented the former notables from rallying to the new régime. The Consulate endeavoured to restore order and to reorganize the administration. The prefects who were placed at the heads of the Belgian departments were all foreigners, but they were instructed to select officials not merely from such Belgians as were supporters of the government but also from those who were opposed to it. The latter, however, in general declined to exercise their functions, and many of the municipal councils remained incomplete. By degrees public security was re-established and brigandage ceased. Commerce revived and the Bourse at Antwerp was reopened in 1801.

Bonaparte was not concerned solely with the restoration of civil peace, but was anxious also to secure religious peace, although with the proviso that the bishops should be converted into ecclesiastical prefects. All the bishops appointed in Belgium after the conclusion of the Concordat (1802) were foreigners. He aroused violent opposition among the Belgian clergy by the 'organic articles', which in reality modified the Concordat and made the imperial church a State church. Stevens, former vicar of the chapter of Namur, refused to enter into communion with the new bishops and attacked the imperial catechism, which in his opinion gave too great a place to the worship of the emperor.

The censorship, decreed under the Directory and definitely organized under the Consulate in 1800, restricted political liberty, but was not exercised with regard to scientific and literary works. The French language was imposed on the

Flemish districts, where works published in Flemish were obliged to be accompanied with a translation; the result was that intellectual activity in Flanders was limited to the aristocracy and the *bourgeoisie*, as it had been prior to the French conquest. The Revolution was thus in the Flemish districts devoid of that popularizing and liberating influence which it possessed in France, in the intellectual no less than in the political sphere.

From 1804—that is, from the time of the proclamation of the empire—Belgium was at last treated on a footing of absolute equality with France, and from this time the majority of the former notables consented to take part in public affairs. According to the ideas of Napoleon, Belgium was to be entirely assimilated to and incorporated in the French fatherland. He demanded the same sacrifices from the one country as from the other. By means of conscription he drew from their families an ever-increasing number of young men, and he adopted rigorous measures towards those who failed to come forward when they were called up, or who deserted. In order to discover them he billeted soldiers on their parents, and these soldiers conducted themselves as if they had been in an enemy country, proceeding to requisitions and to arbitrary arrests. The imperial government further made use of a system of mobile columns, whose duty it was to track down fugitives. One levy of troops succeeded another, and from 1807 recourse was had to the calling up of classes before their time of service was due.

The territory of Belgium offered to Napoleon a maritime base which he regarded as indispensable for the consolidation of France; in reality, he wished to use it for an attack upon England. In 1803 he made a journey through Belgium, with the primary idea of examining the condition of this frontier, and he then decided upon the creation of a naval arsenal at

Antwerp and the construction of a fleet, the flag of which should be constantly displayed between the Scheldt and the Thames. Antwerp was the chief objective of the English expedition which took place in 1809 and resulted in the occupation of the island of Walcheren. The hesitation and lack of skill of the English commanders resulted in the failure of this enterprise. Bernadotte hurried from Wagram, and had time to collect the scanty forces which he found in the neighbourhood of Antwerp; he succeeded in intimidating the enemy, who, decimated by fever, abandoned Zealand. The same year Napoleon ordered the construction of vast works for the extension and defence of the port of Antwerp. In 1811 he visited them and was struck by the activity which prevailed in the newly built basins; 'the Flemings', he said, 'cannot complain of the French administration: in a few years it has created the elements of industrial and commercial wealth in a country hitherto abandoned to its own resources'.

The emperor was deceived as to the benefits of his government. It is true that at first Belgium benefited from the large market which France offered for its industry and commerce, but the continental blockade soon annihilated these advantages. Antwerp declined as a commercial port to become a formidable military harbour and an arsenal. The whole of Flanders was organized with a view to the defence of the position of Antwerp, and Ghent became the seat of the high command of the army of 'la Tête de Flandre'. Economic distress only increased, and it helped to intensify the feeling of passive hostility which had never ceased to exist.

The efforts of the imperial government to 'Gallicize' the Belgian people were especially obstructed by the clergy, particularly after the breach between Pius VII and Napoleon (1809). At the national council of 1811 the bishops of Ghent, Tournai, and Namur demanded the release of the pope; the



first two were interned in a fortress and forced to resign their positions.

Antipathy always existed between the conquerors and the conquered. The imperial officials were feared; they failed to make themselves popular or to make the Napoleonic régime beloved. That régime was characterized by an ever-increasing despotism, an example of which was afforded by the insolence of the government in the case of Werbrouck, Mayor of Antwerp. This magistrate, accused of conniving at frauds committed against the customs, was acquitted, but the emperor at once annulled the judgement by a *senatus consultum*. Never did Napoleonic despotism show itself more impatient of any obstacle or less respectful of individual liberty. Aversion to the sovereign increased in proportion to the increasing number of men whom he demanded for waging his murderous campaigns.

Belgium shared the destinies of France down to 1814, when the allies invaded the Napoleonic empire. On February 1 in that year Brussels was evacuated; Antwerp, defended by Lazare Carnot, who distinguished himself by his care for the civilian population, capitulated some days later. Almost at the same time the Congress of Châtillon decided that France should be reduced to her frontiers of 1792, and that Holland should receive an accession of territory. The Congress of Vienna declared the former Belgian provinces to be ownerless lands and united them with Holland to form the kingdom of the Netherlands (1815). The occupation of Belgium by the allies produced serious calamities, requisitions, pillage, and a food crisis. Finally the battle of Waterloo (June 18, 1815), at which the Belgian contingent excited attention by its bravery in the assault of Mont-Saint-Jean, secured the deliverance of the country. By the second Treaty of Paris (1815) France was compelled to cede Philippeville, Mariembourg, and Bouillon,

which had been acquired by her under the Peace of the Pyrenees.

For more than twenty years Belgium had been subjected to a Gallicizing process: her nationality had remained. La Tour du Pin, Prefect of the Dyle (Brabant), bore witness to this fact when he left Brussels in 1813. 'This people', he said, 'is neither English, nor Austrian, nor anti-French; it is Belgian.' As a result of the foreign domination, patriotic sentiment was strengthened. But on the other hand, the whole political organization had been remoulded, society had been revolutionized, and no one wished to return to the old state of things. The fact was that the régime of the privileges, monopolies, and monarchy by right divine had seen its day. Belgium emerged from this time of trial entirely renovated by the adoption of the principle of the equality of citizens before the law and by the propaganda in favour of modern liberties and of national sovereignty.

*Belgium reunited to Holland (1814-30)**i. William I and the Fundamental Law*

IN order to safeguard the peace of Europe, the Great Powers had erected the kingdom of the United Netherlands as a bulwark against France. At the moment when they had resolved on the creation of a unified state they had also stipulated that the union between the two contracting parties should be 'intimate and complete'. The delicate task of carrying this idea into effect was committed to a prince whose mentality resembled that of the enlightened despots of the eighteenth century. Hardworking and inspired by a high sense of duty, jealous of his prerogative, fussy about trifles, and remarkably obstinate, William I conceived that he could by the exercise of authority regulate the political and social life of the new state, and harmonize the very divergent tendencies of the two Belgiums. Holland, profoundly Calvinist, saw in the sovereign the protector at once of her nationality and of her religion. The original Catholic Netherlands were almost driven to distrust such a ruler: in that country, the constant changes in political administration had served to accentuate the influence of the Church. From the social point of view the contrast between the two elements in the new state was not less striking; the higher *bourgeoisie*, traders, were predominant in the north, and were essentially national in their culture; in the south a similar degree of influence was wielded by the ancient nobility and the lesser *bourgeoisie*, both classes being profoundly affected by French culture, even in the Flemish zone. The prosperous principality of Liège, which was so sympathetically inclined towards French ideas, had greatly

contributed to their diffusion. These social differences arose mainly from the divergency in the economic activity of the two countries: Holland was essentially commercial, while Belgium was agricultural and manufacturing. Economically, the two districts might have completed one another, and promoted the material development of each other. Unhappily the financial situation of the two countries was very far from similar: Holland had a debt of almost two milliards of florins, while that of Belgium amounted only to thirty millions.

William I had himself limited his power by means of the 'fundamental law' (1815), which permitted the nation to share the legislative power; two chambers, representing the nation, under the archaic and misleading title of States-General, were to assemble alternately at a Dutch and at a Belgian town. But the members of the upper chamber or Senate were nominated for life by the king personally, and those of the second chamber were elected from among the members of the provincial States, over which the royal commissioners or governors exercised a preponderating influence. These chambers voted the ordinary budget for a term of ten years, with the result that their control over the executive was appreciably reduced. The ministers were not responsible. The constitution guaranteed civil liberties and freedom of worship, but all the laws and decrees of the Napoleonic period subsisted, with the result that the centralization of the administration allowed the king to exercise his personal power. He maintained, for example, in order to preserve his control over the press, a decree issued by Napoleon during the Hundred Days, against journals which disturbed the public peace or which showed themselves favourable to the rule of a foreign power. This decree established a special court for the punishment of such crimes or offences.



As a matter of form the fundamental law was submitted to the notables of Belgium. The Belgians protested against the article under which the second chamber was to contain an equal number of Belgian and Dutch deputies, on the ground that the population of Belgium formed three-fifths of that of the whole kingdom. The Belgian episcopate resisted the provision for the equality of all creeds. The vicars-general of the diocese of Ghent solicited from the Congress of Vienna the restoration in Belgium of all the privileges which the Catholic Church had enjoyed prior to the French conquest. Prince Maurice de Broglie, Bishop of Ghent, published a pastoral letter recommending the rejection of the fundamental law. A large majority of the notables (527 out of 796) actually declared in favour of rejection. About a quarter of these voted against the equality of creeds, while more than a hundred abstained from recording their votes at all. The king regarded the abstentions as votes in favour of the law, and setting aside the negative votes based on opposition to the equality of creeds, declared that the fundamental law was approved. This method of treating votes was described as Dutch arithmetic.

The bishops, headed by the fiery Bishop of Ghent, at once proclaimed that to take the oath to the constitution would be to 'betray the most sacred interests of religion'. Thanks to the conciliatory attitude of the Vatican, however, the government found a solution of the difficulty; the oath was considered as indicating merely political adhesion to the principles embodied in the fundamental law. But the Bishop of Ghent continued his campaign against the government. By order of the king, proceedings were instituted against him; he fled, and was condemned to deportation for contumacy.

*ii. Difficulties of Assimilation*

William I offended the aristocracy and the leisured classes by the fact that he selected from their number only a few of his ministers, diplomatists, and high officials. He offended them still further by the fact that he imposed the Dutch language as the only official tongue in the Flemish districts (1823): many careers were thus closed to the sons of those families who had received a purely French education. The increase of French culture among the *bourgeoisie* had been accelerated by immigration; a large number of refugees and political fugitives, Bonapartists and Republicans, had crossed the frontier from France, and Belgian art itself relied upon the prestige of the great David, who was an exile at Brussels. As for the lower class in the Flemish districts, they were so ignorant that they prided themselves on speaking a different language from the Dutch.

The king believed that he could gain the sympathy of the Belgians by showing particular regard for their material interests. He gave vigorous support to Belgian industry by securing for it the aid of many Dutch capitalists, and he shared in the foundation of several manufactures.

From the economic point of view the union with Holland promised great advantages, being especially favourable to the development of external trade and of industry on a large scale. The Dutch colonies constituted valuable markets, and the commercial expansion of Holland could not fail to profit Belgian manufactures. William I always paid very special attention to the economic interests of his realm. He completed the system of communications: Maastricht was united to Bois-le-Duc by the William canal (1822), Ghent to Terneuzen by a wide canal (1825-7); the canal of Pommeroeul to Antoining made possible the conveyance by water of coal to the Scheldt

without passage through French territory. The canal from Brussels to Charleroi was begun. Numerous roads were constructed; markets were completed or built. The ports of Antwerp and Ostend, better organized, received an increased amount of tonnage; in the first, the amount almost doubled between 1818 and 1829, over a thousand vessels entering the harbour in the latter year.

Great capitalistic enterprises were supported by the king, who personally shared in them. In 1822 was founded the 'Société générale pour favoriser l'industrie nationale', which advanced funds to manufacturers, and in 1824 the 'Société générale de commerce' to assist exportation by national vessels. These enterprises were crowned with success. On the other hand, manufactures were further aided by new inventions and by the increasing use of machinery. The king interested himself in the factories of the Phoenix at Ghent and of Cockerill at Seraing, which produced steam-engines and, after 1823, steamships.<sup>1</sup> The production of cloth and of tissues increased more particularly at Ghent, which town attained to a degree of prosperity unknown to it since the sixteenth century. Progress was also made in the production of velvets and of cloth in Flanders; the tapestry and porcelain industries at Tournai once more showed vigorous life. On the other hand, the production of coal made surprising progress, and the metal industry and industries allied with it achieved a parallel degree of development. With government support blast furnaces for the making of coke were constructed at Seraing (1821) and at Marcinelle (1827). New industries, such as crystal-making at Val-Saint-Lambert (1826), came into being; and the manufacture of arms, begun at Liège under the Consulate (1802), prospered greatly.

<sup>1</sup> William Cockerill, an English mechanic, constructed various machines in 1800; the first was used in 1806 at Verviers for cloth-making.

In order to maintain national industry the government from 1821 remitted more than a million florins annually of the receipts of the *douane*, although at the same time, in order to encourage commerce, it reduced the protective tariff, with the result that Belgian industries were forced to engage in a difficult struggle against foreign competition. The economic interests of Holland as a commercial country were in opposition to those of Belgium, which was agricultural and industrial; the former desired free trade, the latter protection. The situation was still further complicated as a result of the financial difficulties with which the government had to contend. Holland had a vast debt in 1814, and under the Treaty of Eight Articles Belgium was forced to bear one-half of this. In order to meet this debt and to make good the deficit in the budget, the king had recourse to new imposts which weighed heavily upon the Belgian provinces.

The economic change resulting from the establishment of great capitalistic enterprises and the use of machinery had their effect upon social life. On the one hand there developed a powerful industrial aristocracy, which recalled the *nouveaux riches* of the sixteenth century and the influence of which was constantly increasing. On the other hand there came into existence an ever-growing proletariat, the situation of which was precarious, since its members were at the mercy of economic crises and were not organized in defence of their own interests. The king and the government were ready to come to the assistance of the unemployed, but they devised no means of permanently remedying the evils of the position of the industrial proletariat. Their situation, like that of the agricultural labourers, was rendered still more unsatisfactory by the fiscal policy of the government.

William also relied upon the spread of education to draw the two nationalities together and to effect that 'complete



and intimate assimilation ' which was desired by the powers. He organized three universities (Ghent, Louvain, and Liège), many secondary schools and primary schools, under government control.

Despite everything, the assimilation did not take place. An acute observer, the Austrian minister at the court of the Netherlands, declared from the first, 'The kingdom of the Netherlands will never be consolidated and will never fulfil its mission in Europe as long as the constitutional and administrative union is not replaced by a federal system'.

The first breach between the Belgian and Dutch deputies occurred in 1821 on the subject of the measures needed to meet the ever-growing deficit. The government scheme proposed the imposition of taxes upon the grinding of corn and the slaughter of cattle, and was vigorously, although ineffectively, combated by the Belgian representatives on the ground that these taxes would weigh more heavily upon the rural classes in Belgium than upon those in Holland, for the latter consumed potatoes to a much greater extent than the Belgians, and there were in Holland only a small number of petty cattle farmers raising beasts for their own consumption.

The educational policy of the government aroused a lively opposition on the part of the clergy. It aimed at monopolizing public instruction, or at least securing State control of all educational establishments. Many religious houses refused to ask for the authorization required for conducting schools, and were closed.

But what excited still more discontent among the clergy was the attempt of William I to form a national clergy, imbued with Liberal principles and devoted to the government. In 1825 he established a philosophical college at Louvain, which was intended to replace the classes in philosophy which prepared for the seminaries; all intending to enter the seminaries

for training priests were compelled first to attend this college. The king was convinced that he did not exceed the limits of his civil authority, since, unlike Joseph II, he did not regulate the seminaries themselves, but only the institutions preparatory to them.

De Gerlache, a lawyer, made himself the exponent of the Catholic grievances in the first States-General and the champion of 'liberty of education'. William I attempted to calm the Catholic agitation by negotiating a concordat with the pope (1827) regulating the election of bishops and stipulating for the creation of three new bishoprics in the Dutch provinces. Through the Vatican, he let the Belgian clergy know that attendance at the philosophical college would not be required from future seminarists. This retreat on the part of the king offended the Liberals, who opened a violent campaign in the press by means of the organ of Louis de Potter. William then wished to draw back and maintained the system of the philosophical college. De Potter still continued his attacks upon the government, and published in the *Courrier des Pays-Bas* an article urging the Liberals to cease their campaign against the Jesuits and instead to 'deride, cover with shame, and proscribe the supporters of the government'. For this he was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and a fine. His defenders, Van Meenen and Van de Weyer, delivered eloquent speeches, the political allusions in which aroused real enthusiasm, and the Liberal deputies vigorously demanded liberty of the press, as the Liberals of France were doing at the same period.

### *iii. The Union of 1828*

From 1828 there began, at first at Liège and later at Brussels and in the rest of the country, a *rapprochement* between the Catholics and the Liberals which eventually developed into the

Union and which aimed at the accomplishment of the following programme: ministerial responsibility, liberty of the press, liberty of education, trial by jury in political as well as in criminal cases, suppression of the taxes on grinding and slaughter, and withdrawal of the regulation as to the employment of the Dutch language. The first result of the Union was a great petitioning for the redress of grievances. William I was anxious on his side to work upon public opinion, and founded for this purpose a newspaper called *Le National*, but he entrusted its editorship to a disreputable man, the Florentine Libry, Count de Bagnano, who had been condemned in France for fraud. He further attempted to break the Union by making advances to the Catholics; he declared attendance at the philosophical college to be optional for intending seminarists (June 1829), and authorized the reopening of the small seminaries. In the course of a journey which he made through Belgium, he was, however, unable to hide his wrath against those who opposed him; in answer to an address from the burgomaster of Liège, he alluded to them and declared their conduct to be 'infamous'. This unhappy word re-echoed far and wide and contributed to the success of a new series of petitions for the redress of grievances. The king replied by demanding from officials an oath of fidelity to the principles of the constitution as he interpreted them, and threatened a more rigorous punishment of press offences; he demanded and obtained from the States-General the vote of a new law on this point. The prosecutions instituted against journalists hostile to the government led to a lively agitation, which was hardly calmed by the grant of tardy concessions, such as the restoration of French as the official language of the administration and tribunals side by side with Dutch. The establishment of the Supreme Court at The Hague, on the other hand, produced violent protests in the press, which resulted in new

repressive measures. Except a few extremists, however, no one thought of a revolution ; the aim was merely a change in the political system on the lines of the programme of the Union. The journalist de Potter, one of the chiefs of that party, who had been condemned to eight years' banishment, demanded 'liberty in all things and for all', and opposed 'the sovereignty of the constitutional charter' to that of the king.



## *The Revolution of 1830 : the Kingdom of Belgium* (1830-1)

### *i. Initial Disturbances (August 25—September 15)*

AT first sight it appeared to be probable that the July revolution in France would produce no corresponding effect upon the Low Countries. It is true that the Liberal press celebrated the 'three glorious' days of the Barricades, and that they predicted the fate of Polignac for the Minister of Justice, Van Maanen, who was reputed to be the king's evil genius. But the general temper of the people remained calm, and the king noticed no signs of unrest when in August he visited the brilliant industrial exhibition which was in progress at Brussels. Certain high officials, however, warned him not to rely too confidently upon appearances, and the chamberlain, Count Mercy d'Argenteau, even pressed him to remain in Belgium. None the less it was with the most complete confidence that the king returned to his château of Loo in Guelderland.

Meanwhile the emissaries of the French Radical party conducted secret intrigues with the more extreme opponents of the Dutch system, such as the advocate Gendebien, who attempted, although without success, to secure the co-operation of the government of Louis-Philippe. French cockades presently appeared in the streets of Brussels; the cries *Vive la France ! Vive la liberté !* were raised, and it was clear that the most trivial incident might produce an explosion. Such an incident was supplied on August 25, the day following the king's birthday. Some weeks before, the public had been much excited by the presentation of an opera called *La Muette de*

*Portici*; it had frantically applauded a piece which by the nature of its subject, the revolt of the Neapolitan Masaniello against the Spaniards, lent itself to demonstrations against the government. The chief of police, however, did not think it necessary to prohibit a further production of the piece at the Théâtre de la Monnaie.

Before the close of the performance the crowd made its way to the offices of *Le National*, the windows of which were broken, and then proceeded to sack the residence of Libry and to set on fire that of Van Maanen. Next day the mob began to pillage shops and to destroy factories. Taken unawares, the police and the military authorities did nothing to check these disorders, and a civic guard was organized by a few energetic citizens, including some former officers, such as Van der Smissen and Pletinckx, with the approval of the governor. Order was actually restored, but as early as August 28 the Liberal journalist Ducpétiaux had hoisted the Belgian flag on the tower of the town hall, and the movement thus assumed a definitely national character. On the evening of the same day fifteen notables met in the former hall of the States-General in the same building, and instructed Van de Weyer to draft an address to the king, demanding the abolition of the 'disastrous system' which had been set up by his ministers and the immediate summoning of the States-General.

While these events were taking place at Brussels, the king, angered by the excesses which had been committed in that city, resolved on the advice of Van Maanen to dispatch thither a force of 6,000 men under the command of Prince Frederic, who was accompanied by his elder brother, the Prince of Orange. Neither, however, received the necessary instructions as to the attitude which they should adopt towards the council of notables and the commanders of the communal guard. They secured that a delegation from these irregular bodies

should come to Vilvorde, but they were unable to reach an agreement with them and demanded the removal of seditious insignia and flags. The delegates issued instructions to this effect at the personal request of the princes. Immediately the streets resounded with the cry 'To arms', and barricades were erected. A further delegation of notables obtained a promise from the Prince of Orange that he would enter the city with his staff alone. He was greeted with cries of *Vive la liberté!* and *A l'hôtel de ville!* Against his will, he was compelled to pass through the Grand'Place in order to reach the royal palace, which he finally attained at a gallop in order to escape the fury of the mob. Gendebien then proposed to the prince to effect the administrative separation of Belgium from Holland, which implied the nomination of the prince as viceroy or lieutenant-general with a residence at Brussels. The prince, however, declared that he wished to confine himself to acting as mediator. He found himself unable to calm the agitation, riotous manifestations taking place under his windows. Eventually, 'unable to resist a tide that was constantly gaining strength', he left Brussels, after promising to urge his father to grant that administrative independence which was so much desired.

Meanwhile Liège and Louvain had risen on hearing the news of the events which were occurring in Brussels, and in a short space of time the majority of the other towns, with the exception of Ghent and Antwerp, followed this example. Bands of volunteers gathered at Brussels, where more barricades were set up. The notables established a committee of public safety with the consent of the governor, but this body was overruled by the club of the Central Union, founded on September 15 by Charles Rogier, a lawyer and journalist, who had led the volunteers from Liège and who professed frankly revolutionary ideas. At this very moment the crisis

was intensified owing to the refusal of the king to establish at once a separate administrative system. In a speech delivered at an extraordinary session of the States-General, he declared his opposition to any concession to faction and to any measures which would sacrifice the 'well-being of the fatherland to passion and violence'.

*ii. The Revolutionary Days (September 20—October 21)*

September 20 marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of the revolution. Some popular bands, mingled with the volunteers from Liège, invaded the town hall and demanded arms in order to meet force by force, according to the wish of the leaders of the Central Union. Anarchy was at its height when there arrived (September 21) an ultimatum from Prince Frederic, who was approaching the city with 12,000 men. The notables, including even Gendebien, Van de Weyer, and Count Felix de Mérode, had left the town. All despaired of the future, knowing that Brussels was not prepared for defence. 'We are in want of arms, munitions, and money,' wrote Gendebien to de Potter, who was then at Paris.

On September 23 the main body of the Dutch army easily forced an entry by the gate of Schaarbeek and installed itself in the Park and the palaces. But it was hardly able to penetrate into the neighbouring streets, where the rebels had erected barricades. Three small columns which attempted to enter the city by other gates were checked near them by a cross-fire from the barricades and neighbouring houses. On the 24th news arrived that the Dutch general, Cortheyligers, after a battle fought to the north of Louvain, had abandoned the idea of taking that city, and hundreds of peasants, called to arms by the tocsin, hurried to Brussels. At the news of these unexpected successes Van de Weyer and Gendebien soon



made their way back to Brussels, distributing an 'Appeal to the people'. Thenceforward a certain number of the *bourgeoisie* helped to swell the ranks of the revolutionaries, who continued their victorious resistance to the Dutch troops. At this stage a provisional government was established at the town hall. September 26 saw a further increase in the resistance, and during the course of that night Prince Frederic, discouraged, secretly left the city with his exhausted troops.

All reconciliation with the king was now impossible. The memory of the 'martyrs of September' inflamed patriotic sentiment, and secured the triumph of the idea of complete independence for Belgium. The provisional government entrusted a central committee (de Potter, Rogier, Van de Weyer, de Mérode, Gendebien) with the executive power and summoned a national congress (October 4), an imitation of the National Assembly of the American Republic.

It was in vain that the Prince of Orange issued a proclamation from Antwerp in order to secure for himself the government of the country in the name of his father. Simultaneously King William addressed a vigorous appeal to arms to all his faithful subjects, and urgently demanded the intervention of England, Prussia, Austria, and Russia to subdue the revolution. He disavowed his son, when the prince in a new proclamation recognized Belgium as an independent state. Meanwhile the patriotic party made rapid progress; Belgian soldiers from the garrisons joined the rebels; all the towns, including at last Ghent and Antwerp, expelled the Dutch troops and placed themselves under the authority of the provisional government. The citadel of Antwerp alone remained in the power of the king's forces. On October 21 William I, being anxious to gain time to prepare coercive measures, asked for an armistice, and at his request the conference of the five powers assembled in London forthwith imposed one, thus

recognizing the Belgians as belligerents. Despite the armistice, the city of Antwerp was bombarded by the Dutch troops, who had been attacked by the mob during their retirement to the citadel (October 27).

### *iii. Foundation of the Kingdom of Belgium (1830-1)*

On November 10, 1830, the National Congress met at Brussels. It was representative of the upper and wealthier classes, its members having been elected by direct suffrage by citizens paying a moderate amount in taxes or qualified for the vote on the ground of the positions held by them. After confirming the powers of the provisional government, the congress proclaimed the independence of Belgium, and by a large majority declared in favour of the establishment of an hereditary constitutional monarchy. In this way it conciliated the powers, who were very hostile at that time to the republican system of government. On the other hand, it offended them by excluding for ever from all authority the members of the House of Orange-Nassau; this made impossible the personal or family union which was desired by the majority of the powers, and which was to have been brought about by the accession to the Belgian throne of the Prince of Orange, the eldest son of William I. However, the Conference of London, composed of representatives of the five powers, soon afterwards proclaimed the principle of the future independence of Belgium (December 20). William I at once protested and made every effort to induce the rulers of Prussia, Russia, and Austria to assist him to regain Belgium. The year before he had flattered himself that he had 'only to whistle' to bring the Prussians into Belgium. But the King of Prussia, Frederic William III, although urged to intervene by the Russian general, Diebitch, was unwilling to take the risk of undertaking a European war, practically the whole burden of which would

have at first fallen on him, Russia being deeply engaged by the revolt of Poland and Austria by disturbances in Italy. France and England were agreed on the necessity for finding a peaceful solution for the Belgian question. The three absolutist powers, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, distrusted the results of the Belgian revolution, the daughter of the Revolution of July, and feared the actual or disguised annexation of Belgium, or of a part of it, to France. Prussia then took the initiative in securing the neutralization of the soil of Belgium, and the Conference of London adopted this principle as early as January 20, 1831.

The Congress elected as sovereign by a majority of two the Duke de Nemours, son of Louis-Philippe, but that king refused the crown of the new state for his son. A critical period then began, in consequence of the weakness of the regent, Surlet de Chokier, to whom the Congress had entrusted the government during the negotiations on the matter of the selection of another sovereign. All kinds of influences, Orangist, Republican, French, and so forth, conflicted with each other, while numerous difficulties arose on the question of fixing the boundaries of the new state. The King of Holland claimed to retain Luxemburg in his capacity as Grand Duke of Luxemburg, a title which he had acquired in 1815 in exchange for his hereditary possessions of Nassau-Dillenburg, and the Congress insisted on the integrity of the historic territory of Belgium, of which Luxemburg had formed since the fifteenth century the largest province.

Finally the Congress selected (June 4) as king Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, whose first wife had been Princess Charlotte of England, and who was about to marry Louise-Marie, daughter of Louis-Philippe. Leopold did not accept the crown until the Conference had settled the preliminaries of peace—the Eighteen Articles—which reserved the question

of Luxemburg and left ground for hoping that this province would be preserved for Belgium. William I refused to subscribe to these preliminaries and suddenly declared war on the King of the Belgians. His arms secured an easy triumph; the Belgian forces, badly equipped and badly organized, were defeated at Hasselt and Tirlemont. At the moment when they were driven back on Louvain, they secured the assistance of a French army, hurried up at the request of Leopold. The campaign had only lasted ten days; but it secured for the King of Holland a revision of the preliminaries. The Conference of London decided by the Twenty-four Articles to grant to him the eastern half of Luxemburg and a section of Limburg equivalent to the portion of Luxemburg left to Belgium. William I, however, did not accept these terms until 1839, with the result that for eight years Belgium provisionally held the whole of Limburg and Luxemburg, except the fortresses of Maastricht and Luxemburg. The Great Powers, however, by the treaty of November 15, 1831, guaranteed the execution of these articles and the independence and neutrality of Belgium.

The National Congress, which dissolved itself after the inauguration of Leopold I (July 21, 1831), had determined by the constitution, completed as early as February 25, 1831, the basis of the new state. It applied in it the essential principle of national sovereignty, thus differentiating it from all the constitutional charters of the Middle Ages; it declared formally that 'all powers emanate from the nation'. It entrusted to the king, whose person was recognized as inviolate, the executive power as well as a share in the legislative and judicial powers. The ministers, the instruments of executive power, were responsible to the legislative chambers (the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies). These chambers, which were elected directly according to the method prescribed



by the constitution, were to vote the budget annually and also to settle the annual contingent of the army. The constitution proclaimed, in addition to the liberty of the individual, freedom of association and the right of public meeting, and the free use of languages, as well as the liberty of the press, liberty of worship—these two last rights being pressed for by the Liberals—and liberty of education—which was especially demanded by the Catholics, who further secured the complete independence of the Church. The constitution was the most liberal in Europe, and Lamennais was justified in saying that its spirit made Belgium the natural enemy of Prussia. This constitution was the product of the union of the Catholics and the Liberals, which had been formed, as has been seen, to check the extension of State control designed by the King of Holland. Moreover, as a result of the reaction against this centralizing policy, it assigned a considerable share of authority to the communes, but within limits compatible with the unity of the state; the constitution thus revealed the prestige of the old self-governing civic communities and supplied a link between the present and the past. On the other hand, it left in existence practically the whole structure of centralized administration, as well as the civil and penal codes which had resulted from the French government of the country and had been maintained under Dutch rule. These codes had been moreover elaborated in accordance with the principle of the equality of citizens, which was also proclaimed by the constitution.

Thus the new state rested on three essential bases, the sovereignty of the people, liberty, and equality. It will be seen that there was no connexion between the constitution and the mediaeval charters of the Belgian principalities. Those charters emanated from the sovereign power of the prince and sanctioned privileges or monopolies to the advantage of orders, political or religious corporations, associations, or

even of private persons. The Belgian constitution was the work of the representatives of the nation or at least of the representatives of what is known as the 'pays légal', that is, the body consisting of all the classes deemed to be enlightened, and it was inspired by the ideal of combining the maximum of liberty with the greatest possible measure of equality. It also realized for the first time the complete unity of Belgium ; it fused into a single nation, possessed of national consciousness, all the small states, Flanders, Brabant, the district of Liège, Limburg, the district of Namur, Hainault, and Luxemburg, which had for many centuries been united by common political and social traditions, by economic needs, by their aspirations, and by their memories of their past.

The constitution thus opened a new era, while it was the result of age-long strivings towards autonomy and independence. It was singularly well adapted to the land of those energetic and obstinate communities who defied despots and conquerors, who, often as they were subdued, bore themselves after every storm as did the Liégeois of the Middle Ages, of whom it was said in foreign lands, 'toujours ils redressent leurs crêtes' (they always raise their heads again).

## *Independent Belgium during the Experimental Stage (1831-48)*

### *i. The Belgo-Dutch Question*

THE treaty of November 15 had been drawn up in the spirit of the Conference, its object being to secure a good understanding between Belgium and Holland. It was with this end in view that such considerable advantages were accorded to William I, who was thus enabled to continue to fulfil the European mission which he had fulfilled since 1815; the assignment to him of half of Luxemburg and half of Limburg allowed him to control the course of the Meuse. As for Belgium, thoroughly weakened as a result of its disasters of August 1831, it was rendered quite incapable of aggression, deprived of any strategic frontier 'in the interest of European peace', which was the chief object of the Conference. This object, however, was nearly defeated by the refusal of the King of Holland to sign the treaty in question. 'It is impossible for me', William wrote to his brother-in-law, the King of Prussia, 'not to continue to look upon Leopold as my enemy. My cause is not only my own, but that of all legitimate governments.' In this way the King of Holland sought to exploit for his own profit the hatred felt by all absolute monarchs towards the Belgian revolutionaries. Falck, his minister in London, who feared that the attitude of his master would shortly provoke a general conflagration, attempted in vain to dissuade him. When he communicated to him the text of the twenty-four articles of the treaty of November 15, he wrote to him: 'What Lord Ponsonby said a few months ago of the Belgians—"that they held lighted matches near the powder-

magazine"—may be said to-day, with still more truth, of the Dutch.'

Fearing that he would have to bear the whole brunt of war, Frederic William III resigned himself to accept the *fait accompli* of the separation of Belgium from Holland. In a letter to Nicholas I, he emphasized the fact that their union had been effected in 1815, not in the interest of the House of Orange, but in that of Europe; and he insisted on the paramount necessity of safeguarding the latter in the present circumstances. He silenced his heart, he said, so as to hear only the dictates of 'public reason'.

Metternich severely blamed the King of Prussia for failing to intervene from the first in the Belgian revolution, and, in no measured terms, described the treaty of November 15 as 'scandalous'; but he found himself crippled by the revolutionary movements which disturbed the north of Italy. He aimed nevertheless at the establishment of close co-operation between the three absolute powers, with the object of destroying as far as possible the work of the Conference of London by dissolving it.

The Tsar, on his side, seemed determined never to recognize the prince who was placed at the head of this 'republican monarchy', which had shattered one of the chief creations of the Congress of Vienna—the kingdom of the Netherlands. He declared that in any case he would not recognize the King of the Belgians until the King of Holland had done so.

Thus, the ratification of the treaty of November 15 was extremely problematical, especially as even France for a time looked on it with disfavour. Louis-Philippe was annoyed at the concessions which Leopold had made to the four other powers with regard to the fortresses. In his speech from the throne in July 1831 he had ostentatiously laid stress on the destruction of the barrier created against France, boasting



of it as the most brilliant result of his diplomacy. Moreover, Talleyrand had persuaded him from the first that no sooner was the neutrality of Belgium recognized than the fortresses 'would, so to speak, fall of their own accord'. The wish was father to the thought. He did not ignore the fact that his colleagues at the Conference believed in preserving, as far as possible, the work of the Congress of Vienna. They admitted, however, that the independence and the neutrality of Belgium entailed modifications in its military situation; that it was necessary, in particular, to demolish the fortresses, the upkeep of which would henceforth be a useless drain on the country. Unprovided with adequate garrisons, they would prove rather a danger than a safeguard to Belgium. So the absolute powers imposed on King Leopold, as a condition of their adherence to the twenty-four articles, special arrangements—in the determination of which England also took part—which culminated in the 'Convention of the Fortresses' (December 14, 1831); only the towns of Menin, Ath, Mons, Philippeville, and Mariembourg were to be deprived of their fortifications, while the other fortresses of the old barrier were to be maintained in good condition by Belgium. The convention was further confirmed by secret articles which stipulated that, in the event of the violation of Belgian territory by France, Prussia and England should assist in the defence of Belgium by occupying the fortresses in question.<sup>1</sup>

The list of fortresses to be demolished differed from that which had been drawn up a few months earlier as the result of an arrangement between France and Belgium. Philippeville and Mariembourg, ceded by France in 1815, had been substituted for Tournai and Charleroi, which were the keys to the valleys of the Scheldt and the Sambre. Louis-Philippe wrote at once

<sup>1</sup> These clauses were actually quoted recently by jurists of Germany, in order to justify the German invasion of 1914!

to Leopold : ' I hope that you will not ratify the convention which your plenipotentiary has allowed himself to sign and which we hold to be contrary to your engagements.' He even threatened not to ratify the treaty of November 15, should satisfaction be refused him. He vigorously urged Talleyrand to obtain from England a modification of this measure, which he regarded as humiliating. The old diplomatist did not look at the question in the same way as Louis-Philippe, who was anxious to parry the attacks which were directed against him by the Party of Movement, that is, the faction which favoured war. Talleyrand's great object was above all not to compromise the English alliance and with it the peace of Europe. ' If we maintain peace ', he wrote to Princess de Vaudemont, who acted as an intermediary between him and Louis-Philippe, ' the Belgian fortresses will fall of themselves, since no one will undertake their maintenance : if we engage in war, we shall have to take them.' But he secured for Louis-Philippe a certain measure of satisfaction. Over this question Van de Weyer displayed real skill by the way in which he spared the susceptibilities of the different powers : he was the chief author of the declaration of January 23, 1832, in which the four powers which had fixed the convention concerning the fortresses recognized that this convention did not in any way impair the sovereignty of Belgium or her neutrality. In the course of the negotiations which preceded this declaration, Van de Weyer insisted on the fact that the King of the Belgians succeeded solely to all the rights of the King of Holland with regard to these fortresses. The absolute powers wished in like manner to bind Leopold to all the obligations of the Dutch king, but the Belgian plenipotentiary pointed out to them the impossibility of adopting such a course of action, by reason of the very neutrality guaranteed to Belgium by the five powers. All that the powers which distrusted France could

obtain was the right of superintending the demolition of the fortresses. The Belgian king refused to agree to the foreign inspection of the old barrier fortresses—which had been tolerated by the Dutch king—thus freed from all military servitudes.

Some days later, France and England exchanged ratifications of the treaty of November 15 with the Belgian plenipotentiary (January 31, 1832). But the representatives of the three absolute powers, wishing to obtain the adherence of the King of Holland, resolved to delay the ratifications of their governments. William I proved intractable, and obstinately refused to treat with the King of the Belgians, whose throne, moreover, he considered to be quite insecure and doomed to disappear during the first European storm. He communicated his irrevocable decision to the absolute monarchs, exhorting them 'in the name of morality and Christianity' to maintain order and civilization in Europe. In point of fact, the only real encouragement he received was from the Tsar, who had become more than ever the champion of 'legitimacy' since his brother had caused 'order to reign at Warsaw'. He was still further prejudiced against the first King of the Belgians by the welcome which the latter had given to a certain number of Polish officers, who were admitted into the ranks of the Belgian army. It is true that this army, which only numbered forty thousand men in November 1831, had lately doubled its strength and lacked experienced officers; that appeal had already been made to French officers<sup>1</sup>—which caused great dissatisfaction to English statesmen; and that Belgium then accepted the services of other foreign officers, and more especially of those Polish exiles who had shared in the disastrous insurrection of their country against Russian despotism. They were a valuable addition to this new army,

<sup>1</sup> Leopold I had called the French general, Évain, to take command of the war (March 15, 1832), and had appointed Deprez, another French general, as Chief of the General Staff.

which was to swell its numbers to a hundred thousand by the end of the year 1832. But, by thus displaying its sympathy with the Polish revolution, Belgium became yet more odious to the Tsar. Accordingly, he categorically reproved the conciliatory attitude of his representatives at the Conference of London, an attitude which consisted, according to the words of Matuscewic, one of their number, in bringing about a 'compromise between the principles of justice and the demands of reality'. Nicholas I then sent Count Alexis Orloff, to whom he had often before entrusted delicate missions, to The Hague. The secret instructions which he gave him enjoined him to prevent by any means in his power a close alliance between France and England, in order to keep them from taking coercive measures with regard to Holland. But before the Tsar's confidant had time to reach the Dutch court, he received from his master new and totally different instructions. In fact, in the interval the Tsar had obtained knowledge of a new draft for a Belgo-Dutch treaty, devised by William I, in which that king put forward the most absurd pretensions; Nicholas even suspected the French Legitimists of having urged the Dutch king to take up this uncompromising attitude in order to provoke a general conflagration, which they might exploit for their own profit. He immediately directed his ambassador to observe an attitude of prudent reserve, and to inform King William that Russia would play a purely passive part; that she would take no share whatever in the coercive measures which the Conference was preparing to take against Holland; but that, on the other hand, she would not oppose their execution. William I reaped the fruits of his uncompromising policy, which imperilled the peace of Europe. To quote the Princess of Lieven, wife of the principal representative of Russia at the Conference of London: 'The King of the Netherlands has made an unfair use of the protec-





**BELGIUM**  
in 1831  
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tion offered to him and found in it an encouragement to resistance, which forces the other powers (France and England) to declare themselves in favour of the treaty.' She foresaw, before Orloff's mission, the part that Russia would play at this juncture: 'After all,' she added to her appreciation of William's tactics, 'the chief interest of all is to preserve peace, and in order to preserve it England must be kept in the ranks of the alliance, and to keep her there it is absolutely necessary for all to associate themselves in an act which it is no longer humanly possible for England to repudiate.' By adopting this passive attitude the Tsar, in actual fact, although indirectly, associated himself with the essential act elaborated by the Conference of London: he thus gave it his tacit approbation.

The representatives of Prussia and Austria at once approved of this attitude of Russia and, at the same time, made the necessary arrangements for proceeding to exchange ratifications of the treaty of November 15, subject to reservations with regard to the rights of the Germanic Confederation over Luxemburg. This exchange took place on April 18, 1832. The protocol was left open, in order to enable Russia to participate in the ratification of the treaty. But her delegates made reserves with regard to three articles (the navigation of the Scheldt, the construction of a road across that part of Limburg which was ceded to Holland, the proportion of the Dutch debt to be borne by Belgium), observing however that the object of these articles did not longer require the intervention of the powers, and was a matter only for negotiations between Holland and Belgium; and that, consequently, the latter would benefit, despite these reservations, by all the pledges made to her by the five powers. This momentous declaration implied the adherence of Russia to the essential provisions of the treaty of November 15. The exchange of the Russo-Belgian

ratifications took place on May 4, 1832. It was only brought about after laborious negotiations, in the course of which Van de Weyer displayed real diplomatic ability. This happy result of his work was not at first adequately appreciated by his compatriots; the Belgian chambers severely criticized the concessions he had made and did not take into account the services he had rendered in securing the definite recognition of Belgium by the five powers. The latter renounced the system of arbitration and from that time contented themselves with lending their assistance to settle the difficulties which were still existing between Belgium and Holland.

The different exchanges of ratifications were thus accomplished in three acts, and in somewhat different terms. As a Belgian publicist observed, the treaty of November 15 entailed in consequence no collective obligations on the powers. The truth of this was soon evinced when there was a question of passing to measures for its execution.

William I refused to obey the orders of the Conference before the evacuation of the citadel of Antwerp and the fortresses of the Scheldt. The position was still further aggravated by the fact that the Belgian government, under pressure from the chambers, put forward the claim to decline negotiating with Holland until the total enfranchisement of the territory should be effected. Palmerston's threats to proceed to coercive measures did not alarm William I, who knew that public opinion in England was largely opposed to such a policy. Louis-Philippe, on the other hand, proved to be in favour of armed intervention in Belgium, despite the advice of Talleyrand, who feared to encourage 'the Belgian and French revolutionaries'. The marriage of Louise-Marie, daughter of Louis-Philippe, with King Leopold (August 9) had taken place in opposition to the will of the famous diplomat, but, at any rate, it drew the bonds of sympathy closer between France and the

new monarchy. In Belgium, patriotic enthusiasm had reached such a height as to imagine that it would be easy to avenge the disasters of August 1831.

The government worked feverishly at the mobilization of a considerable army, but was met by criticisms of the war budget in the chambers. Be that as it may, Leopold, on the advice of Stockmar, adhered to his conciliatory intentions. He informed the Conference that he was willing to enter into negotiations before the complete liberation of the territory. In spite of all this, William I persisted in his policy of obstinate refusal. It was then that the Conference at length decided on measures of execution; but its members were far from unanimous as to the kind of measures to be employed. While the delegates of the absolute courts merely wished to deprive Holland of a part of those pecuniary advantages which had been promised to her, the English and French delegates were in favour of coercion. And there was disagreement even among the two last powers. The English minister objected to the fresh intervention of a French army in Belgium; he, however, finally approved of the report of Lord Durham, Lord Privy Seal, son-in-law of Grey and a friend of Leopold I, which pointed out the necessity of intervention in favour of the Belgians in order to put them in possession of Antwerp, 'a place guaranteed by us and by all Europe'. A Franco-English agreement regulated the method of intervention. The result was that the Russians retired from the Conference, which was thus momentarily suspended. France and England then showed special deference towards Austria and Prussia, and even suggested that the latter should occupy a portion of Limburg which, according to the treaty of November 15, should have passed to Holland and was still in Belgian possession. But, at the Tsar's instigation, the King of Prussia refused to lend himself to any measure which might prove



prejudicial to William I, and, in defiance of France, dispatched an army of observation to the Rhine and concentrated troops at Aix-la-Chapelle.

On November 15, 1832, Marshal Gérard crossed the Belgian frontier at the head of an army of sixty thousand men and accompanied by the princes of Orléans and Nemours. Simultaneously, an Anglo-French squadron was sent to blockade the Dutch coast, while an embargo was laid on Dutch ships under orders from the French or English governments. The Belgian army was unable to co-operate in the siege of the citadel of Antwerp and remained encamped in the neighbourhood of Diest. King Leopold, however, established his headquarters at Lierre, ready to repulse a possible invasion by the Dutch army on the frontier. The Prince of Orange, who was there, dared not give them the order to advance at the moment when he heard the noise of the bombardment of the famous citadel. The Dutch garrison, commanded by General Chassé, offered an heroic resistance, and refused to capitulate until spent by exhaustion and lack of water. The citadel was handed back to Belgium, but the forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek remained in the possession of Holland, which furnished the Belgian government with an excellent excuse for refusing to evacuate those parts of Limburg and Luxemburg which were to be ceded to Holland in accordance with the treaty of November 15. William I still hoped to recover the Belgian provinces by the help of a counter-revolution or a crisis in Europe. Belgium was in a state of exasperation at the slowness of the diplomatic negotiations. The Chamber of Representatives attacked the ministry, in its impatience to put an end to this system of temporization: 'It is high time', cried one of its most influential members, Charles de Brouckère, who had formerly been Minister for War, 'that we stop being English or French, and become Belgians.' The Belgian chamber,

ignorant of the details of the diplomatic negotiations, did not realize the attitude actually assumed by the cabinet during their course. It was just then under the influence of the impression which had been produced by an unseasonable demonstration from deputy Mauguin, in the French chamber : this man had insisted on two occasions that Belgium should herself bear the expense of expeditions undertaken in order to force the King of Holland to agree to the decisions reached by the powers. General Goblet, who had taken the direction of foreign affairs, had addressed vigorous protests to the cabinet at the Tuileries ; but he had not informed the Belgian chamber of this for fear of endangering the peace of Europe. It was useless for him to insist on the fact that France and England had undertaken not to relax their coercive measures with regard to Holland so long as the latter neglected to conclude some kind of agreement with Belgium—whether final or provisional—as a proof of their determination loyally to fulfil all obligations laid upon them by the treaty of November 15. The Belgian chamber continued to assail the ministry with such bitterness that the latter ended by resigning. It was then that Leopold I availed himself for the first time of a prerogative to which he only had recourse in exceptional circumstances—namely, the dissolution of the chamber. During this period almost the whole of the press kept up the agitation, accusing the former ministers of too much submission to the foreign powers. The Orange party, or advocates of a reconciliation with Holland, who were still numerous in Ghent and Antwerp, profited by the occasion. The *Messenger de Gand* called the national representation ‘The Assembly of Idiots’ and the king an ‘Idle Usurper’, surrounded by intriguers and imbeciles. At Antwerp, the Orange party formed into a group and founded the society of ‘Loyalty’. But, like their friends at Ghent and Brussels, they were exposed

to the violence of the people, who were eager to sack their houses. The communal authorities in Ghent and Antwerp did not even take the necessary precautions to protect them. In April 1834 serious disturbances occurred at Bruges as a result of the sale of the horses of the Prince of Orange at Tervueren. Certain of the Orange party had started a subscription in order to buy in some of these horses and to give them back to their former owner. A great many subscribers were found among members of the nobility and of the financial aristocracy. But no sooner were the names of these disclosed than a violent movement of popular indignation broke out and found vent in the pillage of a regular series of aristocratic dwellings. Throughout these excesses the civic guard maintained an attitude of indifference, which had rather the appearance of protecting the pillagers, and the army took no action whatever. Even the prosecution of the disturbers of the peace at the request of the Minister of Justice led to no result. The seventy-seven accused who were brought before the court of assizes at Mons were all acquitted. Many of them excused their participation in the pillage by declaring that they had been told that it was 'for the king'. All these disturbances, together with the impunity allowed to their perpetrators, contributed to discredit a monarchy and a government which the absolute powers did not as yet take seriously. Moreover, they played the game of the King of Holland only too well.

Under pressure from England and France, William I nevertheless consented—in return for the raising of the disastrous embargo on Dutch navigation—to sign with Leopold a provisional convention stipulating for an armistice of indefinite length, the free navigation of the Scheldt and the Meuse, and the *status quo* in Limburg and Luxemburg, i. e. the entire occupation of these provinces by Belgians, with the exception of Maastricht and Luxemburg (May 21, 1833).

From that time the King of Holland practically recognized the head of the new kingdom. Accordingly, all the powers, with the exception of Russia, immediately entered into diplomatic relations with Leopold.

An immediate renewal of the Conference of London was thus made possible, and the Dutch and Belgian ministers for foreign affairs were called upon to take an active share in them. No agreement could, however, be reached on the questions of the navigation of the Scheldt and the Meuse; of the roads which were designed to unite Belgium and Germany, across the part of Limburg ceded to Holland; and of the share to be assigned to Belgium in the Dutch debt contracted prior to 1830. William I, on the other hand, contributed to postpone the settlement of the Luxemburg question, by demanding from the Germanic Diet its renunciation of all rights on that portion of Luxemburg which reverted to him by virtue of the treaty of November 15.

Be that as it may, the convention of May 21, 1833, which he had signed with King Leopold, had strengthened the international position of Belgium and assured it. As Lord Grey said to the Princess of Lieven: 'It is a matter of indifference whether the business is brought to an end or is left where it now rests; the country is very prosperous, and as the convention of May 21 guarantees peace this provisional state may last thirty years, and I regard the affair as settled until bankruptcy puts an end to the opposition of Holland.' This provisional situation, meanwhile, obliged Belgium to keep its army on a war basis. Leopold's attention to military questions displeased, amongst others, Prince Talleyrand, who declared to Van de Weyer: 'Your king really ought to be a good arch-duchess, protecting the arts and laying arms aside; in this way he would cause no anxiety, whereas a militarist position and attitude will please nobody.'



William I always counted on some European convulsion to enable him to recover the Belgian provinces. He did not regard as of any account the 'partial' coercion which was exercised against him by France and England: 'We wish', he declared in May 1834, 'to be forced by the five powers, and will take no account of a partial coercion like that of 1832. If the powers are not unanimous we shall continue to refuse any definite arrangement. At the worst we prefer the road to Siberia to recognizing Leopold.'

The powers did not agree over the executive measures of the treaty of November 15; but they were unanimous in their determination to prevent Belgium from acquiring military solidity, and to reduce her capacity for defence, under the conviction that the fact of her neutrality would ensure her adequate protection. Most statesmen lost sight of the principle expressed by Wellington apropos of the international constitution imposed upon Belgium: 'The powers of Europe are to guarantee this independence and neutrality. Are these advantages to depend only upon the good faith with which each is expected to perform his engagements? Must they not likewise depend upon the ability of the guaranteed power to protect itself?' This policy of paralysing Belgium was pursued during the years that followed. When the German Diet accepted (1836) the territorial basis of the treaty of November 15, it added one onerous condition, namely, that no fortifications be established in that part of the grand duchy of Luxemburg which was left to Belgium, and especially that Arlon remain for ever an unfortified town. The Brussels cabinet immediately put in a vigorous protest, but this had no effect. Next year a fresh complication occurred—this time with regard to Prussia. The Belgian government had completed the fortifications of Diest, in order to strengthen the line of the Demer, which would have played an important part in the

event of a Dutch invasion. The Berlin cabinet protested against these measures and even recalled its minister; but the Belgian government, backed by the cabinet of London, remained firm and completed the works of defence.

During this period constant difficulties arose in the province of Luxemburg, stirred up by the Prussian commandant of the city, which had remained in the possession of the federal troops. This officer distinguished himself by his brutal and arbitrary conduct; on his own authority he extended the radius of the fortress until it finally reached to a distance of four leagues, thus increasing the disputes with the Belgian authorities. On one occasion he caused a Belgian to be flogged, under the pretence that this man had induced a Prussian soldier to desert—and this method of repression, remarked Treitschke, was a very salutary thing; another time he arrested a troop of Belgian custom-house officers because they were carrying on their business within the radius of the fortress; he lost no opportunities of preventing militiamen from the neighbourhood of Luxemburg from joining their regiments. When the Germanic Diet remonstrated with him on this score he at once declared his inability to comply with its wishes. The French and English ministers to the Diet were frequently obliged to interfere in order to restrain the zeal and arbitrariness of this officer, but they were met at Frankfort by a vigorous opposition and were told that these affairs of Luxemburg were no concern of theirs.

The longer the territorial *status quo* lasted, the more convinced were the Belgians that their two largest provinces, Limburg and Luxemburg, would be left to them intact, with the exception of the fortresses of Maastricht and Luxemburg, which were occupied respectively by the Dutch and the Germanic Confederation. They were therefore unpleasantly surprised to learn, in the spring of 1838, that William I agreed

to the treaty of November 15. He was unable to hold out any longer against the wishes of his country, exasperated by the heavy drain on its resources entailed by the maintenance of the army on a war footing. This decision signified for Belgium territorial dismemberment, the payment of an exorbitant debt, and the discharge of arrears amounting to nearly 142,000,000 francs. The whole country was deeply stirred; innumerable petitions were circulated exhorting the king and the chambers to refuse to suffer the dismemberment of the country; the provincial councils sent protests to the government, and the two chambers voted addresses to the king. The latter, in his speech from the throne (November 1838), promised to defend the rights and interests of the country 'with perseverance and courage'. He lost no time in soliciting the good offices of the sovereigns who were friends of Belgium, his niece, Queen Victoria, and his father-in-law, King Louis-Philippe. But they gave him no hope with regard to the revision of those clauses of the treaty of November 15 which related to territory. The Queen of England evaded answering his appeal for support, at the same time expressing her lively sympathy with the kingdom of Belgium: 'the independent existence of the provinces which form this kingdom', she wrote, 'has always been an object of importance to England; the surest proof of it is that for centuries England has made the greatest sacrifices of blood and treasure for that object.' She added that England would do '*everything* in her power to promote the prosperity and welfare of your kingdom'. She recognized that the treaty of 1831 'was perhaps not so advantageous to the Belgians as could have been wished'. But she was unable to act in opposition to the wishes of her ministers. Now the Melbourne ministry was then in office, in which Palmerston was Foreign Secretary. It took an early opportunity of informing the three absolutist courts and the court

of Brussels, that it was determined to maintain the territorial provisions in question. It had been cautioned against France by Metternich, who was ever ready to create difficulties for that country, and, moreover, it was bound to avoid all European complications on account of the growing hostility which it met with in parliament.

Louis-Philippe, on his side, was unable, owing to the isolation of France, to give the assistance asked for, and dissuaded his son-in-law from resisting the will of the powers by force, as public opinion in Belgium for the most part, where the army had already been mobilized, wished him to do. Louis-Philippe very wisely pointed out to him the disadvantageous position of the western frontier of the country: 'Maastricht and Luxemburg in enemy possession render the defence of the districts of Limburg and Luxemburg impossible.'

Meanwhile, the agitation in Belgium continued to increase, and it became the more dangerous from the fact that at this period the relations between the cabinets of Brussels and Berlin were more or less strained. The latter was displeased with the encouragement lavished by the Belgian press on the neo-Catholic movement in the Rhenish provinces. The arrest of Droste Vischering, Archbishop of Cologne, was roundly condemned by it, as also were all the proceedings of the Prussian government with regard to the Catholic clergy. De Potter, a former publicist who had played an important part in the revolution of 1830, but who had retired to Paris after the defeat of his plan for a Belgian republic, addressed an appeal to the Rhenish people in two newspapers: 'We are free', he said, 'because the people desired liberty. Do likewise . . . O Rhenish! Dare! And you will be free!' He started the notion of a Belgo-Rhenish confederation as he had formerly laboured for a Franco-Belgian or a Belgo-Dutch confederation. But the people of the Rhine provinces



made no attempt to effect a political *rapprochement* with Belgium.

At the close of the year 1838 the irrevocable decision of the powers was made known : all they consented to was a reduction in the pecuniary burdens imposed on Belgium. This further inflamed the spirit of patriotism, and a 'National Association' was constituted, with a view to co-operating by all possible means in the maintenance of territorial integrity. On hearing of these occurrences, Metternich exclaimed: 'I see what they are aiming at; they want to make Belgium a city of refuge for the Jacobins of the neighbouring countries. We shall not allow it! One would think that Belgium aspired to become a second Cracow.' And his conviction was further strengthened when he learnt that the Belgian government had admitted into the ranks of the army the Polish general, Skrzynecki, who would have had the command of a division which was to be created in the event of an emergency. Austria and Prussia immediately broke off diplomatic relations.

In addition to external complications the Belgian government was at this moment faced by internal difficulties. The Republicans and the Orange party turned the situation to their profit and started an active propaganda through the press and in meetings. Moreover, an economic crisis had broken out, throwing millions of artisans out of work and stopping the operations of the Bank of Belgium, so that it was obliged to suspend payment.

It was at this grave conjuncture that the chamber was obliged to pronounce on the adoption of the treaty of April 19, 1839, which confirmed in its essentials that of November 15, 1831. The acceptance of it was proposed by the ministry, which was reduced to three members, several ministers having resigned rather than agree to the dismemberment of the country. The ministry itself, as well as the king, refused to bow before

the will of the powers until reduced to the last extremity and until convinced that resistance was futile. On the very day of the signing of the treaty, Leopold had addressed to Queen Victoria a lament over the 'arrangements forced on us. . . . This country feels now humbled and *désenchanté* with its *soi-disant* political independence, as it pleased the Conference to settle it. They will take a dislike to a political state which *wounds their vanity*, and will, in consequence of this, *not wish it to continue*. . . . A position which it thinks too *humiliating*.

'To see, after eight years of hard work, blooming and thriving political plantations cut and maimed, and that by those who have a real interest to protect them, is very melancholy.'

The chamber devoted thirteen sittings to the discussion of the Belgo-Dutch treaty, imposed by the powers as a condition of the existence of the kingdom of Belgium.

The ministry (de Theux-Nothomb) was subjected to vigorous attacks ; it was reproached for not having at the outset shown the impossibility of extorting territorial concessions, and for having insisted too much on obtaining pecuniary advantages. J. B. Nothomb, who was the moving spirit of these negotiations, pointed out that all these questions were bound up with each other, and that the government had hoped to be able to forgo pecuniary benefits in exchange for improved territorial conditions. He eloquently defended the policy which he had followed, and managed to persuade the majority of the chamber to accept the treaty after a stirring speech in which he showed that there was no 'dishonour in giving way to Europe' (March 19, 1839). Yet, the day before, the opposition had seemed formidable, and Gendebien had created a great sensation by explaining his vote against the treaty by the declaration : 'No, three hundred and eighty thousand Noes, on behalf of the three hundred and eighty thousand Belgians whom you sacrifice to fear !'

Be that as it may, the chief objective of William I had entirely failed. He only managed to despoil Belgium of half of two of her provinces, and even this was largely to the profit of the Germanic Confederation, whose interests were defended by Prussia and Austria. So the King of Holland, humiliated and deceived, abdicated in favour of his son, William II. The latter drew nearer France, hoping one day to come to terms with that power for the partition of Belgium. This was, at least, the conviction of Lord Aberdeen. But Thiers baffled this insane project and declared at this period that the neutrality of Belgium was to France 'an article of faith'.

Frederic William IV, King of Prussia, had on his side views of his own on the subject of Belgium. He looked upon the independence of the country as something highly precarious, which would hardly last more than two generations. His desire, therefore, was that Belgium might attach herself to Germany, and be admitted into the Germanic Confederation—a great defensive league essentially pacific in its character. He attempted to win Leopold I from his French sympathies. But Stockmar, Leopold's adviser, pointed out to him in the course of a conversation that Belgian policy consisted in maintaining her neutrality against every one, and, in the event of being attacked on any side, to unite with whichever party considered it in its interests to defend Belgium and her neutrality.

### *ii. The Catholic-Liberal Ascendancy*

The first phase of the internal evolution of Belgium was marked by the undisputed predominance of those political principles which had produced the revolution of 1830—the limitation of the sphere of State intervention, complete liberty for all, and the separation of Church and State.

So wide were the liberties accorded by the Belgian constitu-

tion, so apparently revolutionary its spirit, that many statesmen, even among those who were most susceptible to the influence of new ideas, questioned whether it could be put into practical operation, whether it was consistent with the maintenance of order and public security. Leopold I himself felt doubts on this point. When the representatives of the Congress offered him the crown in the name of the nation, they communicated to him the text of the constitution which the newly formed state had devised for itself, and Leopold thereupon expressed to his adviser, Stockmar, his misgivings as to the durability of the work achieved by the Congress. Stockmar agreed that the power of the king and his ministers was reduced to very narrow limits, but declared that he had full confidence in the nation, and recommended his master to make a loyal and conscientious effort to put into force such liberal constitutional principles. 'If, after some time, you discover', he said, 'that good government is incompatible with the organic statute, address a message to the chambers and point out to them the modifications necessary. Rest assured that the nation will be with you, and that it will be glad to accept changes which may be shown to be advantageous.'

The king shared in the three powers of government—the legislative, executive, and judicial; but in practice he was more particularly called upon to exercise executive authority and at the same time to direct foreign policy. His ministers, it is true, were responsible to the chambers, which thus determined the political orientation of the government and of the head of the State. The action of the king was essentially to regulate and to hold the balance. It tended to diminish the strain of conflicts and differences between the two chambers.

At first these conflicts tended to be serious enough. The two chambers did not represent the same social classes and consequently did not always defend the same interests. The Senate



consisted only of members of the landed aristocracy, the necessary qualification for membership of the body being very high. At first the nobles were in such a majority in it that it seemed simply a House of Lords. Amongst them there were only a few Liberals; the number of Catholic Liberals was also very small, but it included some men of marked personality, such as Count de Mérode and Vilain XIII, who had played an important part in the revolution and continued to exercise a considerable ascendancy during the period in which Belgian independence was on its trial. Mérode, owing to his family alliances—he was the father-in-law of Montalembert—and owing to his intellectual bias, was strongly in sympathy with the French Neo-Catholic movement. On various occasions he showed breadth of mind, freedom from aristocratic prejudices and from the dull pride which filled the minds of a certain number of nobles, essentially conservative. A supporter of the principle of equality, he regarded titles of nobility as having a merely relative importance, and declared that their holders should in every case be treated in the same manner as any other citizen. On one occasion he adjured the president of the Senate not to call him Count when addressing him in his capacity as a senator. Such reformers, however, were few in number in the upper chamber. The majority of that body was attached to the maintenance of the social prerogatives of the class which they represented, and so it rejected a proposed law of succession which would have imposed special burdens on large inheritances.

The Chamber of Deputies represented essentially the wealthy *bourgeoisie*. It included a large number of barristers, and also, prior to 1848, a considerable body of civil servants, while the other elements of the *bourgeoisie*—manufacturers, merchants, engineers, doctors, and the like—supplied very few deputies. In the lower chamber, Liberal-Catholicism had more adherents

than in the Senate, and amongst them there were some fiery democrats such as Dumortier of Tournai, and the Abbé de Foere, deputy for Thielt (western Flanders).

At first parties were far from being strictly defined. The most important question was that of the foreign relations of Belgium, and by this question the various orientations of policy in the chambers were determined. The king relied upon the moderate elements, the supporters of a pacific, conciliatory policy, who were at the same time firmly resolved to maintain and even to develop the military resources of the State, in order that Belgium might be ready to meet all eventualities.

As early as 1833 signs of the approaching dissolution of the Union appeared, that is from the moment of the provisional settlement of the Dutch-Belgian question. The Union had always been regarded by the Conservatives as foredoomed to failure, and the cardinal Secretary of State had already characterized it briefly as 'monstrous'. Besides that, the principles upon which it rested were formally condemned in 1832 by the encyclical *Mirari vos*. Liberty of the press and liberty of opinion, 'which have spread to the misfortune of religious and civil society', were condemned in vigorous terms. The pope more especially combated 'indifferentism' in France and stigmatized as absurd and erroneous (or rather, perfect madness) the maxim that it was necessary to assure and to guarantee to any one liberty of conscience. The words of the sovereign pontiff were in fact actually addressed to the French Neo-Catholics; but the terms which he used were capable of general application, and this fact did not escape the attention of the higher clergy in Belgium, who had become so powerful owing to the existence of the Catholic-Liberal union.

The encyclical at first greatly disturbed the ecclesiastical leaders in Belgium, but it was presently interpreted as being an enunciation of principles without reference to political

realities and the events of the time, and as being in no case intended to be immediately applied. The majority of the Belgian Catholics were of the opinion that in practice some concessions must be made to the spirit of the age, and that the Belgian constitution was a 'pact' which must be loyally observed. They attempted to practise it in politics while opposing it in religious matters. Their social ideal continued to be inspired by Lamennais. The pontifical document was taken as being hardly applicable to Belgium, and there was only one Catholic who, having been elected a deputy, resigned in order to be delivered from the obligation of swearing fealty to the constitution.

A vigorous reaction soon appeared against these democratic and individualist tendencies, which, as may be imagined, were not to the taste of the higher clergy. That body included among its members prelates who were strongly imbued with the principles of authority and who were anxious to maintain intact the hierarchical traditions of the Church, and for this purpose to tighten the bonds which united it with the papacy. Among the most active and able of these prelates was the Bishop of Liège, Monseigneur Van Bommel, a Dutchman by birth. He had held aloof from the revolution, and for this was reproached both by the supporters and by the opponents of that movement. His rigorous orthodoxy had prohibited him from declaring in favour of his sovereign, but at the same time he was reluctant to oppose one who had had so large a share in his elevation to the episcopate. As soon as the revolution had triumphed, he had accepted the *fait accompli* and had devoted all his energies to securing the most complete autonomy for the Church. Acting in the closest accord with the general of the Jesuits, Father Roothaan, another Dutchman, he took the initiative in the promotion of a series of measures which had for their object the making of the Church the basis of

social organization, and giving her, among other rights, the monopoly of education and charitable relief. He was the chief founder of the Catholic University, established at first at Malines, the seat of the archbishopric, and later transferred to Louvain. This institution was entirely free from any State control, and its foundation antedated that of the two State universities of Ghent and Liège (1834). In his own diocese, he was careful that the primary schools and colleges should be entirely under the control of the ecclesiastical authorities and resisted to the utmost of his power the organization by the city of Liège of educational establishments on a secular basis. He found powerful supporters not only among the Jesuits, but also among the Redemptorists, one of the chief houses of which order—that of Wittem—was established in his see.

Side by side with the higher clergy, the monastic orders were, with the Jesuits, the principal factors in securing a revival of the principle of authority, which had been so seriously compromised by the spread of Liberal principles. The Redemptorists, who, like the majority of the monks who established themselves in Belgium at this time, came originally from France, contributed greatly to this movement by the vigour of their propaganda. They relied mainly upon the pulpit and the confessional, urging frequent devotional practices, increasing the number of pilgrimages, the use of retreats, and so forth. Their activities were as fruitful in the Walloon district, thanks to their establishments at Tournai (1831) and Liège (1833), as they were in the Flemish district, where they had important centres, such as Wittem and Saint-Trond, founded at about the same time. Other monastic communities established themselves by preference in the Flemish district, where they had the special support of the landed aristocracy, which continued to be very powerful and very conservative. The Dominicans or Preaching Friars established their chief house



at Ghent (1835), while the Récollets had theirs at Thielt (1833).

The Premonstratensian monks re-established themselves in the majority of their former abbeys, such as Averbode (1834), Parc, near Louvain (1836), Tongerlo and Grimberghen (1840), and Postel (1841); the Cistercians founded monasteries at Saint-Bernard, Westvleteren and Achel, and at Bornhem. In short, charitable and educational orders developed with an extraordinary rapidity.

In addition to these religious societies, associations of laymen contributed to assist the growing influence of the Church upon all sides of social life. They flourished more especially in Flanders, where the most important, that of Saint Francis Xavier, had been originally founded. The rule of the Xavierians, drawn up by a Jesuit, aimed at increasing devotional practices, at the creation of schools on a strict confessional basis, and at the establishment of unions or clubs for religious intercourse. Its founder, a disciple of the Redemptorists, secured the support of the Bishop of Bruges, and of the banker, Dujardin. Similar organizations were presently established by the Third Order of Saint Francis and by the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (after 1844). The Church exercised an ascendancy which became daily more considerable. It seemed to aspire to play the part which it had played in the epoch of Albert and Isabella, and found itself in some respects in a still more favourable position than it was then. Freed of the Concordat, which bound it in the period of French rule and during the last days of the Dutch government, it was completely enfranchised; it had no obligations towards the State, while the latter was obliged to provide, at least in large measure, for the support of the clergy. Thus it came to pass that the Church in Belgium was more Catholic, that is more universal, than anywhere else; its international character was more strongly emphasized

there, since its relations with the Holy See were not subjected to any supervision by the State.

The tendency of the Church towards autonomy was the outcome of the reaction against the policy of King William ; the power of the government had been singularly diminished.

This decentralization also assisted the efforts of the large towns, which gradually recovered the traditions of local independence which had been interrupted in the majority of them since the seventeenth and in the towns of the district of Liège since the eighteenth century. After an eclipse of more than two centuries, the towns began to recover the brilliant position which they had lost at the beginning of modern times. All at once the municipal spirit revived so vigorously that people have imagined that it was never suppressed, and that it was handed down directly from the Middle Ages. Yet, as we have seen, local self-government was not secured until 1830. But the towns were concerned to guard it jealously, and for this reason they assumed some of the social functions which the State failed to exercise and which the Church coveted—above all, the organization of education and of poor relief. The towns claimed the direction of public primary education, and it was as a result of their efforts that secular colleges existed side by side with those which were under ecclesiastical control. It was under the auspices of the city of Brussels that the Masonic lodges created a free university, which acted as a counterpoise to the Catholic University by championing the principles of free thought. Thanks also to the towns, public primary education was established on a definitely municipal basis. The law regulating primary education was not voted until 1842. It was the result of a compromise between the civil and religious powers. The latter preserved, absolutely free from all State control, their purely confessional schools, and on the other hand the former secured the right to intervene in

the direction of public schools, that is, of the schools established by the communes.

In view of the increasing influence of the Church, the towns, which were the great centres of Liberal ideas, at first inclined to favour a stronger organization of the central power. That power had, as early as 1836, in passing the communal law, somewhat restricted the autonomy of the communes by an article which provided that the burgomaster and the secretary of the commune should in future be nominated by the Crown. But the burgomaster remained still a real communal magistrate and was never transformed into an official of the State.

The leaders of the Liberal party were drawn from the ranks of this *bourgeoisie*, who as a result of their strenuous labour and its success and of the generous character of their ideals came to play a very important part in the second phase of the history of independent Belgium. Among the leaders of this party Rogier had been one of the earliest workers. He was one of those who most laboured for the securing of liberty and for the provision of military defence. He assisted in the organization of that which Belgium had lacked since the days of Philip II, a national army. He aspired to nationalize the whole of the economic life of the nation and for this purpose to increase the sphere of governmental intervention. He was even regarded as an extreme interventionist, since he declared himself that the part of government was 'to enlighten, to stimulate, to encourage, and finally to reward the efforts of those who toiled . . .', and that it was its duty to initiate and to indicate the methods which should be adopted. Rogier had in any case taken a daring course for the period: the creation and exploitation by the State of the first system of railways on the Continent, which was inaugurated in 1835 by the building of the line from Brussels to Malines. He even wished that the State should reserve for itself the exploitation of such coal-mines as had

not been already granted to private persons. At a later date, he declared in favour of the active intervention of the government in the organization of secondary education. Urged by the *bourgeoisie* of the towns, which was eager to be freed from ecclesiastical tutelage, he proposed, in conjunction with Lebeau, whose colleague he was in the Moderate Liberal ministry which secured power in 1840, a law on secondary education, while declaring that he wished to combine it with complete liberty of teaching. He at once became the object of vigorous criticism on the part of the Conservatives, who accused him of wishing to exclude religious instruction from the educational programme. The Liberal doctrine which he defended, and which had for its aim the independence of the civil power, was condemned as anti-social, intolerant, and fatal to the country. The scheme was adopted by the chamber, but only to be rejected by the Senate. There the debates were extremely bitter, and one of the members of the upper house went so far as to demand the dismissal of the ministers on the ground that it was the only way to assure 'the repose and welfare of the State'. Eventually the Senate even took the initiative—a step of which the legality was later disputed—in sending an address to the king in order to point out to him the dangers which were likely to result from 'the deplorable divisions' which had arisen in parliament.

The cabinet resigned (1841) without having accomplished one of the reforms in the new political programme advocated by such men as Devaux—one of the leading spirits in the former Liberal-Catholic union—who was convinced that this union had tended only to the advantage of the reactionaries, and had boldly denounced the prevailing system in the *Revue Nationale*, which he had founded in 1839.

The period from 1841 to 1846 was marked by an increasing alienation between the ministry, which pursued a unionist



policy, and public opinion, which was profoundly divided by the dissensions between Catholics and Liberals. The Nothomb cabinet, despite the ability, energy, and activity of its head, was able to maintain itself in power only by resort to all manner of expedients. Its conduct in the matter of the episcopate secured for it the hostility of the anti-unionists, whose number daily grew.

On the initiative of the Masonic lodges, Liberal leagues were formed at Brussels (1841) and at Liège (1842), and later in other towns, in order to centralize the efforts of the party in the political struggle and more especially at the elections. These leagues were denounced by the Catholics as clubs dangerous to the public peace and as dens of 'Jacobins'. Thanks to this organization, the Liberal movement grew at Liège, Ghent, and Tournai (1843), Brussels and Antwerp (1845), always declaring itself in favour of the doctrines of Rogier and Devaux, and even Tournai sent a Republican deputy to the chamber, in the person of Castiau. A schism between the 'Young Liberals', men of his type, and the 'Old Liberals', or doctrinaires, nearly compromised the success of the Liberal campaign at Brussels and at Liège. But the party reunited in face of the common danger. That danger was the control which the Church was securing over almost every side of the educational life of the country.

The Nothomb cabinet (1841-5), it is true, had tried to effect a compromise between Church and State by the law which organized primary education (1842), and which imposed upon the communal authorities the obligation of having at least one elementary school in which religious education should be supplied by the ministers of religion and over which the ecclesiastical authorities should exercise supervision in conjunction with the civil authorities. Nothomb refused the bishops the right to interfere with the appointment of masters. In the actual

working of the law, the large towns, with their Liberal administrations, safeguarded the lay character of their public schools, while in the rural communes the clergy were entrusted with a large share in the direction of the schools. In the towns of moderate size, there were somewhat violent conflicts between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. While the government endeavoured to secure the autonomy of the Church, it weakened that of the communes by altering the mode of appointing the burgomasters, who might in future be chosen outside the communal council, and by dividing the urban communes into sections in order to secure representation of the anti-Liberal elements in the councils themselves.

A section of the Catholics, discontented with the relative moderation of the Nothomb administration, united with the Liberals to overthrow it. The Van de Weyer ministry which succeeded (July 30, 1845) only lasted eight months ; its projected law on secondary education involved an increase of the power of the State in this matter, alienated the Catholic majority from it, and forced it to resign.

Rogier was asked by the king to form a new ministry, but he demanded as a condition of his acceptance that he should have the right to dissolve the chambers in the event of a conflict with them. The king would not give him this authority, and was thus led for the first time to entrust power to a homogeneous Catholic cabinet (1846). Its members exhibited so reactionary a spirit that a moderate Catholic declared that the ministry was an anachronism or a defiance.

The opposition was merely roused to further efforts, and the Liberal congress which assembled in the same year at the town hall at Brussels adopted a programme which was designed to deprive the episcopate of 'effective power'. This programme, due in large measure to Frère-Orban, then communal councillor at Liège, proposed, in order to secure the indepen-

dence of the civil power, a measure of electoral reform extending the franchise and lowering the voting qualification in the towns, and further the organization of public education under the sole direction of the civil authorities. On the motion of an advanced Liberal, there was added to the programme a proposal for 'those improvements which the condition of the labouring classes and the poor imperatively demands'.

The leaders of the congress demanded the full application of the Liberal principles embodied in the constitution, which had been rendered fruitless, they said, by the interference of the Church in political life. Their theories were regarded as subversive, and alarmed Louis-Philippe, among others; the King of the French wished to prevent the assembling of the congress. He wrote to his son-in-law that he should find means 'to paralyse, strike down, and annihilate that audacious society . . . which is nothing less than a revolutionary convention . . .' The wisdom and tact of Leopold I dictated to him a line of conduct entirely opposed to that recommended to him by Louis-Philippe. He persisted in playing the part of a strictly constitutional king and made no attempt to hamper the action of parties or to interfere with the natural development of the parliamentary system, and when the elections of 1847 showed the decided inclination of the electorate towards the ideas of the congress of Liberals, he decided to entrust the direction of the government to that party. Rogier and Frère-Orban were to play the chief part in the new ministry. The accession of the Liberal party to power occurred in the midst of a very severe economic crisis and on the eve of the revolution of February in France, the effects of which were felt throughout Europe.

*iii. The Crisis of the Years 1846, 1847, and 1848*

The revolution of 1830 had profoundly affected the economic life of Belgium, which it had deprived of many sources of wealth by closing to it the markets of Holland and of the Dutch colonies. External trade, for a while interrupted, found, it is true, new outlets, Brazil and the West Indies more particularly replacing Java and Sumatra, but the total volume of the export trade was still reduced. Manufactures were especially injured by the limitation of the market and were able to maintain themselves only by means of protective tariffs. Metallurgy, thanks to the introduction of improved machinery and the rapid development of the railway system, even succeeded in making progress, and in 1834 many new establishments were set up on the banks of the Sambre and in the area of Liège on those of the Meuse. Textile industries, centred at Ghent and Verviers, equally profited from the new mechanical inventions; at Ghent about 1833 the manufacture of cotton fabrics on the Jacquard loom began, and soon afterwards flax-spinning began to take the place of the distaff and the spinning-wheel. Verviers became an important manufacturing centre; the cloth industry prospered greatly there, thanks to industrial concentration and to the spirit of initiative displayed by the captains of industry.

Protective tariffs on manufactured goods, which were further increased in 1844, produced only a small rise in the price of certain articles of prime necessity, such as linen and cloth. The consumer was much more adversely affected by the protective tariff on agricultural produce and live stock. The sliding scale for cereals, established in 1834, and the restrictions imposed on the import of foreign cattle, especially after 1842, increased the price of food-stuffs. From 1842 the government pursued a policy of high protection. It encouraged



exports by granting bounties and raised to the highest possible point the customs barriers. In 1844 a new law raised the tariff on cereals and was at once nicknamed the law of famine.

Governmental intervention in economic matters increased the severity and the number of the crises. The crisis which took place in Flanders in 1845 and 1846 was extraordinarily severe, since it affected both the urban and rural districts. In the towns, the development of machinery resulted in a glut of commodities in the factories, more especially in the case of woven goods of all kinds. The disposal of these stocks became more and more difficult owing to the fact that the French and Spanish markets were closed and that English competition was becoming more formidable. A large number of workpeople were thrown out of employment owing to this over-production. At the same time, the failure of the potato crop, as a result of a disease which attacked that plant, had disastrous consequences for the labouring and peasant population, to whom the potato had become a necessary of life.

The Flemish districts, in which for three centuries spinning and weaving at home had served to make up for the inadequate incomes derived from agriculture, were especially affected by the competition of machine-made goods and of foreign commodities. Then population rapidly diminished; the birth-rate declined and the death-rate increased to alarming proportions. Numerous bodies of unemployed migrated to Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Armentières, and the Walloon mining area. For many years great misery prevailed. In a large part of eastern Flanders and all western Flanders more than a third of the population were paupers. The flax district (Courtrai and Roulers) was especially impoverished; the Lys, which was used for the rotting of the flax and the waters of which were specially adapted for this purpose, ceased to be the 'golden river' for the home-workers after the mills came to compete with them.

The famine was terrible and was aggravated by three successive bad harvests. In many places hunger drove people to forms of food unfit for consumption, and the culminating point in the misery was reached when cholera broke out to increase their sufferings and to carry off a large part of the population, already weakened and living in deplorable hygienic conditions.

The government attempted to deal with the situation. Rogier created a special bureau for the affairs of Flanders and entrusted it with the consideration of a certain number of remedial measures. It recommended a greater variety in the types of cloth manufactured and advised the flax manufacturers not to confine their attention to the production of their special product, but to turn also to the making of woollen goods, cotton goods, and even mixed tissues. The same minister created model workshops and instructional workshops in many towns in the flax districts, granted assistance to private factories, and made loans to employers of labour. At the same time, he caused a large number of public works to be undertaken in order to give work to the unemployed labourers.

The other provinces suffered less from the economic crisis than did the two Flanders, but at the same time they felt the effects of the distress which overwhelmed so large a part of the population, and experienced themselves the initial effects of the transition to manufacture on a large scale, which system was gaining ground both in the chief urban centres and in the coal-mining districts. The condition of the lower classes became deplorable, and they were unable to help themselves owing to the lack of all solidarity, associations or combinations of workpeople being prohibited. Except in some large towns, there was no movement of opinion in favour of social reforms. Such schemes as were produced for this purpose were the outcome of the work of foreign thinkers: at Liège a vigorous propaganda was undertaken for the realization of 'social harmony' by pacific means.

On the other hand, the theorists who preached class war, such as Marx and Engels, established themselves at Brussels, where they drew up the 'manifesto of the Communist party' (1847), the aim of which was to overthrow the bourgeois organization of society, to make capital common property, and to place the instruments of production in the hands of the State. The famous appeal contained in this manifesto, 'Proletarians of all lands, unite!' roused little response in Belgium, a land which Marx characterized as a paradise for capitalists and a hell for the workers.

When news arrived of the revolution of February, however, troubles were feared. The civic guard kept watch for several days in the chief towns, and a certain number of the *bourgeoisie* who were not already enrolled enlisted of their own accord in the citizen militia. The government also took such measures of precaution as the circumstances dictated. It had no difficulty in defeating the designs of the 'General Association of Belgian Workers', which was founded at Paris. That body issued a proclamation declaring that 20,000 men were about 'to liberate the oppressed fatherland, and to establish the organization of labour on the ruins of capitalistic governments'. The expedition, secretly supported by Ledru Rollin, Minister of the Interior, and by the prefect of police, failed dismally. Forewarned, the cabinet sent troops to Quiévrain, the frontier place where the first detachment of the revolutionaries was to enter, and caused that detachment to be at once arrested. Some days later, an armed band passed the frontier at Risquons-Tout, near Mouscron (March 29, 1848); it was dispersed by musketry fire, and this incident ended all attempts at revolutionary propaganda.

Belgium preserved all its institutions intact just because the principles upon which those institutions were based permitted a great part of the nation freely to control its own

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affairs. A member of the chamber having alluded to the ideas of the French Revolution, one of his colleagues answered that these ideas, 'in order to make their way round the world, had no need to pass through Belgium'.

The February revolution merely led to an extension of the franchise. Rogier met democratic aspirations by proposing a reduction of the electoral qualification to the minimum provided by the constitution. The Right supported this suggestion in the hope of regaining power by means of the votes of the lesser *bourgeoisie* and of a greater number of peasants. 'The government', said Dechamps, one of the leaders of the Right, 'wished by this bold reform to disarm all sincere and constitutional opposition, and not to permit other nations to offer Belgium more liberal institutions than its own.' The reform resulted in an advantage for the Liberal party owing to the increased voting power of the large towns, where henceforward the electoral system no longer differed from that of the country districts, as the system established in 1831 had done.

The Liberal ministry further assisted the development of the press, that fourth estate in parliamentary lands which is even able to control all the other estates, by suppressing the stamp duty on newspapers.

In these critical circumstances, Leopold I exhibited an entirely different spirit from that which was displayed by his father-in-law, Louis-Philippe, whose tendency towards autocracy produced the revolution which cost him his throne. Leopold showed great tact in allowing full play to parliamentarianism and assisted, as has been said, to rehabilitate constitutional monarchy, which had been compromised by the personal policy of a number of his fellow kings. He thus strengthened the international position of Belgium, which was resolved, as he announced in 1840, to maintain 'sincere, loyal, and strong neutrality'.



## *Independent Belgium during the Period of Maturity (1849-84)*

### *i. The Ascendancy of the Liberals*

DURING a period of nearly forty years (1846-84), political power was almost continuously in the hands of the Liberals. It passed into those of their opponents, who were styled at first Conservatives and later Catholics, on two occasions only, between 1855 and 1857, and between 1870 and 1878, periods, it is clear, too brief to allow any decisive reaction to be effected by them.

The activity of the Liberal cabinets was mainly directed towards the settlement of economic questions. They further centralized the management of the State railways, and from 1848 placed their administration, which until that time had been semi-independent, under the direct control of the State. On the other hand they turned commercial policy in a new direction by steadily moving towards free trade. In 1849 the government was authorized by law to annul by royal decree prohibitions upon export, and to reduce, or even to suppress entirely, the export duties imposed by the customs tariff. In order to secure favourable commercial treaties Belgium began by removing the barrier which it had erected against the export of its products. A further measure, passed in the same year, permitted most kinds of foreign goods to pass through the country free of duty. Where agricultural products were concerned the government was obliged to make various concessions, and was only able to develop its policy gradually and cautiously. Not until 1853 could it obtain from the chambers a law authorizing provisionally the free import of cereals, and this

provisional permission did not become definitive until twenty years later. Belgium thus followed at an early date the example of England, and concluded with the various neighbouring powers, except France, treaties of commerce (1857) which to a great extent abolished differential duties; when France also entered on the path of free trade, Belgium was granted the same advantages which had been accorded to England (1861).

The Liberal ministries further pursued a fiscal policy which was designed to relieve the working-classes as far as possible from the burden of taxation, and to favour indirectly by these means the output of national industry. Frère-Orban proposed a succession duty. Representing the middle class, he had a high idea as to the mission of that class; it was not to content itself with governing, but also, he said, to concern itself with the welfare of the greatest number, with the fate of the workers. He persuaded the Chamber of Deputies to adopt his ideas, but was checked by the Senate, which mutilated his Bill as to successions on the ground that it was revolutionary and subversive.

Frère-Orban was more successful in the realization of his projected reform of institutions of credit. He created the National Bank (1850) and established the commercial credit of Belgium on a firm basis. This bank was engaged solely in operations of national importance; it received the exclusive right to issue notes, which were intended to replace to some extent the metallic currency. The bank was further to serve as an intermediary between the capitalists and the producers in order to distribute capital among all classes of society. Its sphere of action was strictly defined; it might not engage in commerce or industry as the older banks had done—the Bank of Belgium and the Société Générale—which banks it replaced as the issue bank.

Frère-Orban was anxious to secure for the National Bank a certain credit based on real property, in order to gain for landowners on favourable terms the capital required to develop the resources of the soil. His scheme was vigorously criticized as being a daring innovation or as being a fanciful combination foredoomed to failure and capable of producing disastrous results. The Catholics were especially alarmed at the growth of State intervention, and at the 'socialistic' tendencies which appeared in the system favoured by the heads of the Liberal party. The chamber gave the scheme its support, but the Senate offered passive resistance. In accord with Rogier, Frère-Orban also wished to unite with the National Bank a general savings bank, in order to organize thrift under the guarantee of the State. Once more the Catholics were opposed to the State character of this institution, and though it was established in 1850 it was not associated with the bank and did not produce the results which its promoters had expected. The same was true of another organization for the promotion of national thrift, the mutual aid societies, created in the following year. The law which regulated their operation received the unanimous assent of the two chambers; it contributed to improve the moral and material condition of the working-class, but that class, however, was slow to realize the advantages it might derive from the law.

The tendency of the Liberal administrations to strengthen the action of the central power did not appear only in their social and economic reforms; it was shown also in the educational measures due to their initiative. These measures were actively resisted by the Catholic party, which wished to maintain the 'vested interests' of the Church. Down to 1850 practically all secondary education was in the hands of the episcopate or of the Society of Jesus; there were very few secular colleges; a small number of towns had succeeded in

retaining them. In 1850 Rogier introduced a measure for the organization of ten higher grade and fifty secondary schools. The clergy at once got up a violent protest when the ministers of religion were invited to supply and to supervise the religious education in these establishments, resenting the fact that they were not to possess control. Some rural communes presented widely-signed petitions in order to prevent the application of the 'socialistic' ideas of the minister, the effect of which, they declared, would be the creation of a State monopoly of education. The bishops addressed a petition to the Senate, and Pope Pius IX himself made known his opinion in a secret consistory, where he alluded to the perils which threatened the Catholic religion in Belgium. The law was voted in its original form, but in the process of applying it a number of modifications were introduced. A compromise was reached, especially at Antwerp, between the communal authorities and the episcopate, and a certain number of towns adopted this 'Antwerp Convention', which in practice left these educational establishments a distinctly confessional character. The majority of the larger towns, however, did not adopt this compromise, and carried into effect the principle of the complete independence of the civil power, which was the basis of the programme of the Liberal party, predominant in these centres.

The reactionary movement which began about 1852 coincided with the organization of the Second Empire in France, in which country the Catholics inaugurated a campaign against the Belgian constitution, called by them 'the secular concordat', and parliamentarism. They charged the Belgian government with wishing to convert that state into a species of revolutionary oasis, the refuge of those expelled and exiled from other lands, in the midst of a pacified Europe. When the Catholic party attained power (1855), it did not interfere with the existing educational legislation or with the existing economic legisla-



tion, but it attempted to regulate anew the relations between Church and State in the matter of poor relief. Since the period of the French government of Belgium, poor relief had been secularized. The Catholic minister, de Decker, aimed at restricting the part to be played by the lay authorities and at creating, side by side with the public service for the administration of poor relief, a wider organization under the direction of the clergy. He proposed to make the clergy the dispensers of alms, the inspirers and the executors of the wills of the rich, and the guardians of the poor. He proposed for this purpose to authorize legacies to religious communities. In the view of the Liberals, this was a return to the *ancien régime* and a restoration of mortmain. A formidable press campaign was organized against the ministry, and when the chamber began the discussion of the Bill a lively agitation broke out at Brussels and in many provincial towns. Bands paraded before the convents with cries of *A bas les couvents ! A bas les jésuites !* The commotion increased to such an extent that the minister deemed it advisable to abandon his project. The communal elections which followed (1857) were a striking defeat for the government. It was obliged to resign against its will, at the instance of the king, who decided under these circumstance to use a prerogative reserved for exceptional cases only, and proceeded to the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies and the nomination of a Liberal ministry, under Rogier. The king was careful to deliver no opinion on the Bill elaborated by the late cabinet ; he advised that discussion of it should be deferred, pointing out the danger of ' any measure which was capable of being regarded as tending to establish the permanent supremacy of one opinion over the other '.

From 1857 to 1870, the Liberal governments were again chiefly absorbed in economic and financial questions. One of

their principal reforms was the suppression of the *octrois* (1860); the towns were compensated and this contributed still further to the centralization of government. This reform gave a remarkable impulse to exchange and reduced the cost of food-stuffs in the towns. At the same time commercial prosperity increased as a result of the opening of the Scheldt, Holland consenting, in return for a money payment, to remove tolls which she imposed on river traffic by virtue of the treaty of 1839. Antwerp forthwith became one of the great markets of central Europe.

The tendency of these ministries towards the establishment of equality and towards centralization was displayed in the educational sphere. A law on the scholarships in aid of students deprived the University of Louvain of the almost complete monopoly which it had hitherto enjoyed. This measure was based on the principle that such endowments are public establishments by their long existence. But the measure aroused such anger among the bishops that Leopold I felt himself obliged to calm it by expressing a hope that in practice some modifications would be introduced.

On the other hand, the establishment of adult schools, due to the initiative of the government, led to serious conflicts with the ecclesiastical authorities, who claimed to apply to them the principles of the law of 1842 with regard to primary schools, and hence to bring them in large measure under their own control.

But it was less by the passing of new laws than by administrative means that the Liberal governments attempted to carry out the essential part of their programme, the extension of the power of the State in those spheres which the Catholic Church regarded as reserved to itself, education and poor relief.

Despite their preoccupation with the campaign against clericalism, however, the Liberals continued to interest them-

selves in the welfare of the labouring classes, and introduced a certain number of fundamentally democratic measures. Turnpikes were abolished on the State roads in 1866; the houses of working-men were exempted from taxation, and the law favoured the construction of new dwellings of this kind. The abolition of the impost on salt (1870) effected a sensible reduction in the budget of the poorer households, and the establishment of the right of association, which was granted in 1867, was a first step towards the attainment of greater social equality. Finally, the workman was authorized to give evidence in the courts on questions of wages on the same footing as the employer.

After 1858 a section of the Liberal party demanded still more democratic reforms in the chamber, more especially compulsory education and the reduction of the military burdens, which in consequence of the system of substitution fell almost entirely upon the lower classes.

Nevertheless the question of clericalism remained the most important political topic. The efforts of the papacy in favour of intimate co-operation between Church and State were supported by a majority of the Belgian Catholics. The Syllabus, published by Pius IX in 1864, after being gradually elaborated during the previous twelve years, condemned Liberalism and other social doctrines and denounced as evil the separation of Church and State. This separation had been effective in Belgium since the issue of the constitution of 1831, although some of the leaders of the Catholic party, such as Woeste, declared later that the constitution had established merely a distinction, not a separation, between the civil and ecclesiastical powers. Whatever may be the true reading of the constitution on this point, the great aim of the Liberals had been to make the separation effective. The Catholic opposition was formidable from the very moment of its organization. Congresses were held in 1863, 1864, and 1867, in imitation of

the congresses of German Catholics (who were themselves fighting against Prussianism), in order to formulate a programme and to discuss methods of propaganda. At the same time the convents, which as a result of legacies and donations had centralized and locked up a part of the public wealth, increased still further their financial power by means of the banks Langrand-Dumonceau, which were directed by leaders in the Catholic world. The number of convents had considerably increased, but the increase in the number of monks and nuns was not proportionate to that of the general population of the country.

The ranks of the Catholic party were further increased by the anti-militarists, especially at Antwerp, who were opposed to the extension of the fortifications of that city which was projected by the government. To the ministry was attributed a design of extending military defences and of modifying the recruiting system for the army by including those who served through substitutes in an army of reserve, and this alienated from the government a part of the electorate. Further causes contributed still further to increase the unpopularity of the ministry, and in 1870 it was overthrown.

For eight years power remained in the hands of the Catholics, but this did not enable them to introduce any legislative reforms of moment, with the exception of the reduction of the electoral qualification for the communes and provinces, by which means they secured a majority in a large number of small towns and in the greater part of the provincial councils. In general they contented themselves with acting by means of administrative measures, by the nomination of numerous officials devoted to their cause, by the interpretation of existing laws in such a way as to favour the increase of clerical authority, and by similar means. The government steadfastly refused to meet the wishes of the extreme Catholics or



Ultramontanes, who insistently demanded the restoration of the *ancien régime* in matters ecclesiastical, and who supported amongst other ideas the claim of the papacy that religious marriage should precede the civil marriage, alone required by law.

During this period the already large number of religious communities was still further increased as a result of the immigration of the German religious, expelled owing to the *Kulturkampf*.

The Jesuits made Belgium the chief centre of their activity (founding there the apostolic school of Turnhout in 1872) and of their international propaganda, more especially of their propaganda in Germany. The Benedictines of the congregation of Beuron settled at Maredsous in 1872 and the Lazarists in the province of Liège near the German frontier (1873).

The extension of monastic influence alarmed the *bourgeoisie*, who especially feared their competition in various industries, and dreaded the return of the system of a network of monastic establishments<sup>1</sup> which had subsisted prior to the French conquest.

Anti-clerical demonstrations thus increased, the most significant being the celebration of the tercentenary of the Pacification of Ghent in 1876. The 'Educational League', formed by the partisans of secular and compulsory education,

<sup>1</sup> The following figures represent the growth of these bodies :

| Year. | Religious houses. |       | Inmates. |        |
|-------|-------------------|-------|----------|--------|
|       |                   | Male. | Female.  | Total. |
| 1846  | 779               | 2,051 | 9,917    | 11,968 |
| 1866  | 1,322             | 2,991 | 15,205   | 18,196 |
| 1880  | 1,559             | 4,120 | 21,242   | 25,362 |
| 1900  | 2,500             | 6,237 | 31,668   | 37,905 |

The number of monks and friars increased more than threefold, while the total population of the country was not even doubled.

issued a manifesto demanding a reform of primary education in all its stages, more especially in the matter of the normal schools, and in order that this object might be obtained, the abolition of the law of 1842.

In 1878 the Liberals regained power and attempted to realize their design of establishing secular and free primary education side by side with the educational establishments under ecclesiastical control. The law of 1879 compelled every commune to have and to maintain a communal school, save in cases specified in the text of the measure. Such religious instruction as the priest might wish to give was to be given out of school hours only. Further, the priest might no longer enter the school as of right and might exercise no control over the teacher, who was dependent only on the communal authorities and on the educational committees established by the government. The Catholic party resisted these regulations, which it regarded as an attack upon communal autonomy and on the rights of the Church, and as tending to interfere with the performance of the Church's educational mission. It stigmatized the new schools, organized in accordance with the law, as 'the godless schools'. The bishops, who had addressed a circular letter to the king praying him not to sanction the law, created a number of private schools, ordered the sacraments to be refused to the teachers of the official schools, and in general to all who in any manner took part in the application of this law.

On the passing of this law, the Liberal cabinet broke off diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Pope Leo XIII had not dared openly to take the side of the bishops. He had advised them not merely to abstain from attacks upon the constitution, which various leaders of the Catholic party had assailed, but even to defend it, because it had produced, in the actual condition of modern society, the system most

favourable to the Church. At a later date, however, he congratulated the Belgian bishops on the zeal which they had shown in preventing, or at least in lessening, the disastrous consequences of the new educational law, which was entirely opposed to the principles and regulations of the Church. As a result of this action by the pope, Frère-Orban recalled the Belgian legation from the Holy See (June 1879).

The Liberal government gave a further impetus to secondary education (1881), in which sphere it attempted to secure the predominance of social, as opposed to ecclesiastical, conceptions of morality. It organized for the first time a large number of middle schools for girls with the object of withdrawing women as far as possible from priestly influence. The spirit of education in these institutions, as in all the establishments of the State, was as far as possible to be freed from all confessional considerations. The clergy were invited to superintend the religious education, but were denied all power to control the secular education which was given by the lay teachers. At the same time the schemes of study were modified, a more important place being assigned to modern languages, to natural and physical science, to history and geography.

The centralization of the government and the simultaneous need of assuring the defence of the State produced a heavy increase of national expenditure. The ministry was thus forced to have recourse to new taxes, which made it very unpopular. It was unable to maintain its position, despite the electoral reform which it introduced in 1883, and which added to the number of electors possessing a property qualification some whose qualification was based upon their civic capacity. Finally the ministry met with vigorous opposition from the progressive Liberals, who formed the party of the extreme Left, and who advocated the extension of the suffrage

to all citizens able to read and write, and other democratic reforms.

The fall of the Frère-Orban ministry in 1884 produced a strong reaction against centralizing tendencies, and against that movement towards secularization and equality which had been so accentuated in the course of the preceding years. The Malou cabinet was inspired by the formula that the maximum of liberty is the minimum of government, and increased by all manner of measures the influence of the Church on all spheres of public life. It abrogated the law of 1879 on primary education, and replaced it by a law which limited the number of public elementary schools by assisting 'free' schools, that is, Catholic schools, on condition that they conformed to a certain number of government regulations. The ministry suppressed a large number of normal schools, primary and secondary, and all the normal schools intended to prepare teachers for the *athénées royales* (State colleges).

With such haste did the cabinet proceed, and with such violence, that a revolution was produced in public opinion, and at the communal elections of October 1884 the Liberals secured such success in the towns that the king regarded it as advisable to relieve two ministers, Woeste and Jacobs, of their portfolios, these ministers being distinguished for their uncompromising views. Malou, the head of the cabinet, also left the ministry, the direction of which passed to Beernaert, a moderate Catholic and a supporter of certain Liberal reforms.

## *ii. Consolidation of Independence*

The social and economic reforms brought about by the Liberal ministries had not only a considerable effect upon the internal evolution of Belgium, but also led to certain complications in the foreign relations of that country. These



complications in their turn reacted upon the political struggles in Belgium. The contrast which existed between the system prevailing in Belgium and that prevailing in France after the *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851, necessarily produced a certain irritation between the two countries. Besides that, Belgium became the refuge of the proscribed, and the sympathetic reception accorded to them offended the French government, which saw in her neighbour a centre of intense opposition and of liberty. To the attacks of the Belgian newspapers, France replied by a violent press campaign against the spirit of Belgian institutions and a demand for a change in the policy of the State, supporting the demands of Catholic opinion. The commerce of Belgium was injured by the suppression of the most-favoured-nation treatment previously accorded to Belgian coal and iron, in the hope of thus reaching the Liberal press of that country maintained by the captains of industry. The conflict with France was intensified by the fact that the revision of the commercial agreements between the two countries was then under consideration, and the king called to the direction of affairs a ministry of very moderate Liberal character (H. de Brouckère, 1852). The task of the new cabinet was to reach an accord with France. Its first step was the passing of a law designed to prevent insults against the persons of foreign sovereigns and spiteful attacks upon their authority.

In 1853, when the Eastern Question produced a conflict between France and Russia, the former power allowed it to be understood at Brussels that if existing treaties were disregarded in the East they might be equally disregarded in the West. The Belgian government, alarmed at this unexpected message, brought it to the knowledge of the powers which had guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium, and the powers undertook not to depart from their engagements. On her side, Belgium, when the Crimean War broke out, announced to Europe that she

would observe an attitude of strict neutrality, acting thus in agreement with France and England. She reinforced her army, bringing the number of the effectives from 80,000 to 100,000 men. She followed the advice which Thiers had given to Leopold I as early as 1850: 'Without adequate means of defence, you will be the sport of every one.' Belgium soon had reason still further to accentuate the defensive character of her neutrality, and to determine for herself the obligations which it imposed upon her. When, in 1855, Sardinia joined the Anglo-French alliance against Russia, the Western powers brought a certain degree of pressure to bear on the other secondary states, and notably on Belgium, in order to bring them into the alliance, on the ground that the balance of power in Europe was at stake, and that the common interest of all states was thus involved. But the Belgian government refused to enter into any engagements, and laid down that Belgian neutrality involved obligations which outweighed all other considerations. In this way it affirmed the full sovereignty of Belgium and the right of that state itself to interpret the duties resulting from its neutrality. Lebeau on this occasion delivered a remarkable speech in the chamber, in which he warned his countrymen against indulging too great a sense of security. He recalled the fate which had befallen neutral states which had regarded themselves as sufficiently protected by a treaty, by what is sometimes called a scrap of paper. 'We must guard against the belief', he said, 'that this neutrality does not involve duties, and important duties. It is essential that we should, in case of need, ensure the inviolability of our territory ourselves, at least up to a certain point.' Shortly afterwards, the neutrality of Belgium was discussed in the House of Commons in connexion with a proposal for the neutralization of the Danubian principalities. Lord Palmerston for his part insisted on the precarious character of a neutrality

guaranteed only by treaties. 'The history of the world', he declared, 'shows that when a quarrel arises, and a belligerent nation thinks it an advantage to cause its army to cross neutral territory, declarations of neutrality are not very religiously regarded.'<sup>1</sup>

The relations of Belgium with the new French empire remained for some while very strained. The Liberal press in Belgium, inspired to some extent by French exiles, increased its attacks upon Caesarism. At the Congress of Paris in 1856 one of the plenipotentiaries of France denounced the excesses of the Belgian press, and the representatives of Prussia and Austria joined him in declaring its repression to be a European necessity. The leading English plenipotentiary recognized that such excesses were regrettable, but at the same time declared that he 'represented a state in which a free press might be described as a fundamental institution', and added that he was unable to associate himself with any coercive measures directed against the press of another state. The Belgian chamber was roused by the violent criticism of which the free institutions of the country had been the object, and, while blaming the few journals which had abused their liberty, loudly demanded that the constitution should be maintained in its entirety. The attitude of the government was as decided. When one of the members of the chamber demanded to know if, in case a great power requested a change in the constitution, the cabinet would be prepared to suggest compliance, Vilain XIII, Minister of Foreign Affairs, answered, 'Never', amid the plaudits of the assembly.

<sup>1</sup> Some German writers invoked these words of Palmerston in an attempt to justify the German violation of Belgium in 1914. It is clear that the words are very far from justifying such an infringement of international law; they go no further than to indicate that neutrality, unsupported by reasonable armed forces, is a fragile thing.

Meanwhile the government interested itself in the reorganization of the defensive forces of the country; in conformity with the views of a committee appointed to deal with the question in 1851, Antwerp was converted into a fortified camp which was intended to shelter the government in time of war and to serve as a refuge for the army. King Leopold I vigorously urged the realization of this project, which in his opinion would double the defensive capacity of the country. He regarded the matter as one of personal concern, and one day confided to an English diplomat, 'On one subject I choose to have a will of my own, and that is the defence (of the country)'. But it was only the Liberal cabinet of 1857 which gave the scheme its definitive form and which ensured its adoption. Napoleon III regarded it as an indication of distrust of his designs, and showed annoyance at the measures of security which the Belgian government regarded as indispensable. The *Constitutionnel*, his official organ, declared that Belgium had nothing to fear, that the treaties were the best assurance of her safety. Across the Channel, *The Times* replied that Belgium, which had so often been the battle-field of Europe, might well become it again, and that it was to the interest of the Continent that the barrier which separated the great military monarchies should be as strong as possible. It was then the eve of the Italian War, which might have well developed into a general European conflagration. Precautions were taken hastily, in a large measure owing to the insistence of the king personally.

Belgian statesmen were more and more disturbed by the annexationist ideas of Napoleon III, and more especially after the incorporation of Savoy and Nice with France (1860). They feared that the emperor might come to an understanding with Prussia, and this fear was shared outside Belgium. In October 1861 the Prince Consort of England wrote to Lord



Clarendon, 'What could be easier for Prussia than to come to an arrangement with France, in accordance with which the latter would aid the former to conquer the secondary states of Germany, receiving Belgium as payment? . . . England would have to fight alone for Belgium.' Napoleon III, according to the evidence published much later by Émile Ollivier, French Prime Minister at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, regarded Belgium as 'an artificial creation directed against the greatness of France, and without any right to inviolability'. He instructed his press to propagate the theory of 'great territorial unities before which small states were bound to disappear and by which they would be absorbed'. At this time Benedetti, his envoy at Berlin, negotiated with Bismarck a secret treaty leaving France full liberty for the annexation of territory. Bismarck did not reveal the existence of this treaty until 1870, but that existence was already divined. After Sadowa, statesmen were continually obsessed by the French danger. They saw, with reason, in the pretensions of Napoleon III to the grand duchy of Luxemburg the first step towards the confiscation of Belgium. A conference of the powers met in London with the object of preventing war, and succeeded in persuading Prussia to agree to the demolition of the fortifications of Luxemburg and the neutralization of the grand duchy. The Austrian representative made a proposal having for its object the handing over to France of the cantons of Philippeville and Mariembourg, in order to restore the frontiers of 1814, and the compensation of Belgium by means of the grand duchy of Luxemburg. But the Belgian government made known to its plenipotentiary that it was not prepared to cede any part of its territory.

Having failed on this side, Napoleon III considered for a time the imposition upon Belgium of commercial union with France. He here met with insurmountable opposition

on the part of the Belgian government supported by the other powers which had guaranteed Belgian neutrality. The emperor thereupon sought to gain possession of an important part of the system of Belgian railways, more especially of those of the line of the Meuse, the administration of which had been undertaken by a French company under the guarantee of the French government. Frère-Orban, who had become head of the cabinet in 1868, showed real ability in these circumstances ; in the course of a mission to Paris he informed those who were in the emperor's confidence why the Belgian government must oppose the cession of these lines to a French company. He showed them that this attitude arose from the necessity of observing strict neutrality. He further alluded to the advantages accruing to France from the maintenance of this neutrality, among them the preservation of good relations with England (a power specially interested in the independence of Belgium), which relations were so much valued by the emperor. The political dispute ended in a complete agreement on commercial questions ; intercommunication in particular was organized across Belgian territory between the French and Dutch railway systems. The increasing sympathy of Belgium for France developed at the very moment when that state entered upon her unfortunate war with Germany.

As early as July 15, 1870, Gramont, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave a spontaneous promise to respect absolutely the neutrality of Belgium, as well as that of Luxemburg, Holland, and Switzerland, provided that it was not violated by Prussia. It was only ten days later that Bismarck published in *The Times* the Benedetti Treaty, which arranged for an offensive and defensive alliance between France and Prussia, and permitted the former to annex Belgium and Luxemburg in the event of the incorporation of the south German states in the North German Confederation. Soon after this

revelation the English cabinet, on the initiative of Gladstone, thought it necessary to renew with Prussia and France the engagements entered into with regard to Belgium in 1839.

After the fall of Metz, Belgium afforded an asylum to a certain number of French refugees. Bismarck was angered by it, and in a diplomatic note informed the Belgian government that it 'would alienate the sympathies of Germany if it did not cease to exhibit a too benevolent attitude towards France', an attitude which the chancellor regarded as 'contrary to neutrality'. The reply of the Belgian cabinet did not satisfy him, and he officially intimated to the ministry the grave prejudices which might result from it to the country. The Belgian ministry persisted in its attitude; it refused to modify institutions which for forty years had secured the honour and safety of the country, for the sole purpose of preventing a spontaneous expression of opinion which tended to diminish the evils of war without in any way interfering with German policy.

The results of the Franco-German War were disastrous for Belgium. Alsace and Lorraine passed into the hands of Germany, and the valley of the Meuse thus became the obvious line of operations in the event of a new war between Germany and France. The Belgian general staff was convinced that if the first of these powers were the attacking party, she would have a great interest in passing the Meuse at Liège or Namur in order to invade France from the north. And equally, if France took the offensive, it would be greatly to her strategic interest to cross by one or other of the bridges of the Meuse in order to enter Germany by the lower Rhine. As early as 1855, Colonel von Olberg, Prussian military attaché at Brussels, had protested against the idea of an entrenched camp and the extension of Antwerp, and had argued that it was the Meuse that ought to be fortified and defended. In the first years which followed the Franco-German War, the general

staff insisted more and more on these views, and on the duty of Belgium to fortify Liège and Namur owing to the danger that the French would by that route attack the Germans.

Nothing had been accomplished in this direction when in 1875 there was fear that a new general war was imminent. Bismarck, annoyed by the opposition he met with amongst the German Catholics, wished to deprive them of the support which they received from their Belgian and French co-religionists. He even suspected the Belgian ministry—the Catholic party having attained office in 1870—of giving underhand support to the manœuvres of the German Catholics. A Munich paper described Belgium at this time as a ‘nest of Jesuits’, and accused that country and France of being in league with the Vatican against the policy of the chancellor. It was in vain that the German minister in London requested the English ministers to bring pressure to bear on the government of Brussels in order to put a stop to clerical agitation; the ministers refused to do so. Germany then approached the Belgian cabinet directly with regard to certain actions of the Catholic bishops and laymen, and with regard to a strange letter in which Duchesne, a coppersmith, placed himself at the disposal of the Archbishop of Paris for the purpose of killing Bismarck. The Belgian government took the initiative in framing a Bill by which the offer to commit an act of violence against any person would be punished by severe penalties. The resentment of Bismarck towards Belgium was especially vigorous. A confidant of the Crown Prince, Henri Geffcken, informed Morier, the English minister at Darmstadt, that the aim of Bismarck was the destruction of Belgium, which he declared to be the home of clerical conspiracies. He would have agreed readily to the partition of the country between Holland and France, and wished to compensate the latter in order to induce her to accept definitively the loss of Alsace



and Lorraine. In any case, the war scare of 1875 led the Belgian government to increase its precautionary measures. It is interesting to note that from this time forth the views of the German military authorities as to the defence of the Meuse were modified; convinced that their army would always be concentrated before that of France, they considered that the building of fortresses on the Meuse would tend rather to check a German than a French invasion. It was French officers who now pressed on Belgium the idea of completing this work of national defence. The aims of the German government became indeed daily more evident. In 1882 the *Nord-deutsche Zeitung* of March 9 (the official organ of the Imperial Chancellor) wrote: 'Germany has no political motive for violating Belgian neutrality, but the military advantage to be gained might force her to do so.'

The plan proposed by Brialmont aimed at holding the passage of the Meuse at Liège and Namur with the smallest possible force. King Leopold II, who from the date of his accession to the throne in 1865 was always asking questions, urged the completion as possible. Finally, in 1887 the government voted the credits.

### *iii. Material Progress*

As early as 1848 Belgium had begun to transform her economic life; machinery and the development of means of communication had remarkably stimulated her industry and her commerce. Yet frequent crises, such as those of 1834, 1838, and 1847, hindered their progress. Moreover, it is an error to attribute to these new factors of material activity any immediate and profound influence upon social evolution. That influence only made itself felt gradually; in 1848 agriculture was still the basis of the economy of the nation; 25 per

cent. of the population were engaged in it, while only 7 per cent. were engaged in industry.

It was only during the period from 1848 to 1886 that Belgium became really an industrial state, and assumed the aspect which is one of its essential characteristics to-day. The most important factor in the economic evolution which then occurred in the country was the extension of the railway system. The scheme of 1833-4 only included four lines, of a total length of some 600 kilometres, radiating from Malines. The main object was to replace another mode of transit, the river communication between the Scheldt and Rhine being then closed by Holland.

This scheme took ten years to carry out. After 1845 a certain number of branch lines were added to the main routes, and entrusted to the management of private companies, the idea of Rogier being that only the four great lines should be exploited by the State. In general the concessions were granted to English companies; there was in England a veritable 'railway mania'. The Great Luxemburg railway owed its success to the fact that it was regarded as an essential part of a route to India: London-Trieste-Calcutta. Between 1844 and 1870 numerous concessions, covering over 3,000 kilometres, were granted, especially in the industrial areas. The Belgian government eventually appreciated the need for buying them up; the railway system of the coal area competed disastrously with some of the State lines; this was true also of other systems, while the Great Luxemburg railway might be a danger to Belgian neutrality, in the event of a conflict between France and Germany, by being utilized by one of the belligerents. The Northern and the Great Central railways of Belgium, however, still remained important private-owned systems, the latter until 1897, when the nationalization of the entire railway system of Belgium was extended.

At first the carrying of goods was regarded as only a subordinate part of the work of the railways. The lines were, however, early used in Belgium for the transport of the raw material of the metal industry. After 1834, considerable establishments—blast-furnaces, factories, workshops—had been established on the banks of the Sambre and of the Meuse in the Liège district. Over-speculation produced a crisis which was only ended in 1844, thanks to the development of the railways. A fresh crisis occurred some years afterwards, and lasted till almost 1854, when the free trade movement enabled Belgium to find new markets. At that time she resumed the character which she had possessed in the Middle Ages, that of a great manufacturing country, although the industry was of a different character. Her coal resources were developed to an unheard-of extent, as appears from the figures of her production for various years in millions of tons: 1840, 3·9; 1850, 5·8; 1860, 9·6; 1871, 13·7; 1880, 16·8.

An ever-increasing amount of capital was engaged in industry on a large scale; not only were the coal-mines and the metal works able at this time to increase their output to extraordinary proportions, but also the textile factories. Despite the multiplication of machines, the number of persons engaged in these industries constantly increased. It doubled in fifty years, rising from 660,000 in 1846 to 1,100,000 in 1896. During this same period there was a tenfold increase in the motive force employed, even when allowance has been made for that used in the work of transportation. The amount of horsepower of the machinery rose to 40,000 in 1846; it increased to 345,900 in 1870 and to 430,000 in 1896. Appliances were constantly improved, and to this improvement workmen of intelligence largely contributed; it was Gramme, a workman of Liège, who invented in 1869 the first industrial dynamo.

Such intense industrialism was not without its disadvantages.

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In actual fact the productive capacity of Belgian industry increased more rapidly than the outlets for the product of that industry. But the commercial policy of the Belgian government contributed to develop the growth of business ; it procured new outlets for industry on a large scale, and by extending the markets facilitated the acquisition of raw materials. At the same time the consumer was supplied with more abundant food at a lower price ; between 1850 and 1870 the importation of cattle, butter, and grain increased tenfold.

The movement of commerce progressed very rapidly, as appears from the following statistics :

|                  |         | 1841-50.            | 1851-60. | 1861-70. | 1871-80. | 1881-90. |
|------------------|---------|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                  |         | Millions of francs. |          |          |          |          |
| General commerce | Imports | 336·0               | 737·3    | 1,368·2  | 2,413·4  | 2,874·7  |
|                  | Exports | 283·7               | 709·0    | 1,219·8  | 2,097·3  | 2,671·5  |
| Special commerce | Imports | 216·8               | 378·9    | 741·8    | 1,413·1  | 1,509·2  |
|                  | Exports | 167·1               | 350·6    | 596·6    | 1,097·9  | 1,307·1  |
| Transit          | .       | 116·6               | 358·3    | 623·1    | 999·3    | 1,364·4  |

Commercial activity was also intensified by the progress of electric telegraphy, which developed especially after 1850, and of that of the telephone, the first installations of which date from 1883.

Despite everything, the commercial and industrial enterprises of the great capitalists or of associations of capitalists hardly hampered those of the possessors of moderate capital. The middle and lesser *bourgeoisie* profited greatly from the development of material prosperity. Individualist traditions were vigorously maintained. As evidence of this may be mentioned the continuance of domestic industries—arms at Liège, the making of clothing at Brussels, knives at Gembloux, linen in Flanders, the weaving of straw in the Geer valley, shoemaking in the Walloon area, and lace-making in Flanders



and the Campine: the product of all these industries often competed successfully with the output of the factories, and some of them enabled Belgium to keep the production of certain specialities.

During this period, agriculture hardly felt the effect of the new sources of wealth resulting from improved transport facilities and the concentration of capital. Belgium remained the best cultivated and relatively the most productive country in Europe. She owed this to the obstinate industry of her peasants, more especially those of Flanders, who had already made their country, in general sterile, a region of extraordinary productive power. The system of small agricultural holdings combined with stock-raising continued to develop and prosper, while the greater part of the soil continued to be held by the middle and large proprietors. Agricultural production doubled between 1840 and 1880 despite the crisis which occurred after 1870. The purchase value of land, which was 2,180 francs a hectare in 1830, rose to 2,715 francs in 1850 and 3,946 francs in 1866.

The notable growth of circulating capital as a result of the prosperity of commerce and industry had a profound effect upon the whole structure of society. Capitalists, great merchants and manufacturers, gradually replaced the old nobility, who up to 1850 had played an important part in political strife.

The middle *bourgeoisie* equally profited from this material prosperity, and increased as a result of the addition to their class of a certain number of new men, who rose from the ranks of the lesser *bourgeoisie* and even from those of the workers. This was the golden age of the *bourgeoisie*. That class took the largest part in the direction of public opinion, and it may be said that public opinion at that time was the *bourgeoisie*. The press did not as yet touch the lower classes; its influence was confined entirely to the middle and upper classes, who

were the only governing classes, and the only classes able to profit from the liberties embodied in the constitution.

The reign of the *bourgeoisie* was that of energetic and hard-working individualists, of self-made men. The mercantile spirit produced a fruitful initiative in political no less than in economic affairs, and if it was somewhat averse from literary and scientific activity, it yet developed aesthetic tastes owing to an increased demand for articles of luxury. It has not stifled the sentiment of national solidarity, and it has been from the class of the 'parvenus', the bourgeois aristocracy, that there have been drawn the Frère-Orbans, the Solvays, the Warocqués, to whom Belgium owes so many institutions designed to improve social conditions.

However, despite the facilities which certain gifted individuals enjoyed for the amelioration of their social condition, the number of the proletarians constantly increased and an ever deeper abyss yawned between them and the wealthier classes. The problems of poverty became daily more acute and the prevalent individualism showed itself incapable of solving them.

#### *iv. Intellectual and Artistic Development*

In view of the multiple problems originating from such rapid and profound economic and social changes, it is not surprising that the attention of a large number of men of science has been directed towards their solution. Herein may probably be found the chief cause of the tendency of Belgian savants to concentrate upon practical questions during the first decades of the independent existence of their country. Among them, the figure of the mathematician Quételet is prominent. He created the science of statistics and thus supplied a scientific method of studying social problems. He was the real precursor

of sociology in his attempt to bring out the system of laws governing the physical and moral development of mankind.

In addition to mathematics, chemistry, zoology, and geology were also pursued with success in Belgium. The study of law and history was pursued with energy and zeal, but mainly within the limits of the national horizon. The philosophical and religious controversies of the time did not lead to the production of any notable works: these disputes were the echo of those which agitated France during the same period, and turned mainly on the question of free inquiry—a principle rejected by the Church—and on the new dogmas formulated by her, that of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, and that of Papal Infallibility in 1870. In proportion as Belgium entered upon a new era of material prosperity, she acquired also a stronger individuality, and this individuality soon showed itself in a rich and abundant literary output. At first the revival of national sentiment displayed itself only in a more active study of the past history of Belgium. Learned men endeavoured to bring to light the chronicles of the heroic age of the communes and the tragic episodes of the revolt against Spanish domination. It was into these channels that the labours of the Royal Historical Commission were at first directed. Soon, however, men of letters thrilled the soul of the people by recounting the dramatic and decisive moments of the national history. This literary revival was also influenced by the general tendency towards romanticism, which spread rapidly at this period, and which brought into fashion particularly the historical romance. This form of literature was affected by the first Belgians who wrote in the language of Flanders, those who gave the first impulse to the Flemish movement, a movement which was essentially literary in its origin, but was destined to acquire a definite social significance in the next period.

The extreme Gallicization which had followed the revolution of 1830 for a long time paralysed the efforts of men such as Willems and van Duyse towards the revival of literary life in Flanders by the medium of the language of that country. Bilingualism was at that time generally regarded as an obstacle to the intellectual development of the nation. Flemish was only used as a literary tongue in some few chambers of rhetoric, more especially one at Ghent (1834) and one at Antwerp (1836).

It was only very slowly that a change of opinion took place among a section of the educated public in the Flemish districts, which realized the advantages which bilingualism had for Belgium. As an eminent French savant, Camille Jullian, remarked, ' the bilingualism which has been sometimes employed as an argument against the future of Belgium is on the contrary an additional strength to her ; it permits her to receive two influences, to know more of facts and of situations, to learn more and to do more '. It has been generally thought that the Flemish movement is a product of Germanism, of German culture. It is true that there are points of contact, and they will be noted, between Flemish and German literature. But relatively speaking these points of contact are very rare. The Flemish movement is, on the contrary, as a result of the similarity of language, closely united with Dutch literature, while it always preserves a character of its own, spontaneous and eminently national. It is curious to notice that in every instance it has first shown its revival through the medium of the historical novel.

Conscience, son of a French sailor settled at Antwerp, and of a Flemish mother, not only taught the Flemings to read, but interested them in their national legends and revived their patriotic sentiment by describing the most moving pages in the annals of Belgium. His *Wonderjaar*,



that is, the year 1566, which marked the outbreak of the revolt against the religious and political despotism of Philip II, and his *Lion of Flanders*, in which he celebrated the victors of Courtrai (1302), were the brilliant prelude to a long series of works which became very popular. The most pleasing feature in them was the idyllic sentiment which they breathed, and more especially the sincere and feeling picture of the districts in which the various scenes of his romances took place. He showed himself a delightful story-teller, but was above all the painter of the Campine, and has idealized the peasant life which he had learnt to know in his younger days, when he served as a volunteer in the patriot army of 1830. He reproduced with more truth and knowledge scenes of the life of the people of Antwerp among whom he lived. Other Flemish romance-writers and novelists were equally distinguished by their fondness for scenes of popular life, which they rendered with great accuracy and remarkable feeling for form. While Flemish prose thus displayed a sudden and surprising exuberance, poetry likewise began to revive under the breath of patriotic enthusiasm and of the passion for liberty. Romantic individualism, inspired by Byron, Schiller, and Lamartine, is especially represented by Ledeganck, who sang in odes of fine exaltation the three sister cities, Ghent, Bruges, and Antwerp, and their glorious memories. Van Rijswijck rejuvenated the lyric, the ballad, and the satire; Van Beers composed idylls and elegies of captivating charm and skilful rhythm. Finally, Gezelle surpassed all his predecessors by his familiar and mystical poems, which were strongly original and at the same time of a touching simplicity. He was the emotional interpreter of the district of West Flanders, a land of dead towns, but one where the landscapes have a homely poetry, and the manners a savour of the olden time. He wrote for the people as a whole in his review *Rond den Heerd* (Round the

Hearth), in which he had the aid of many of his friends and pupils. He was for many years a master at a normal school at Roulers, but was eventually removed from his position by the Bishop of Bruges, who, like the majority of the higher clergy, was hostile to the Flemish movement.

Belgian literature in French was more slow to develop its originality than that in Flemish. But when it started it showed an extraordinary vitality. The first prose writer to produce anything essentially Belgian was Charles de Coster. He revived in a vivid and stirring form the legend of Thyl Uylenspiegel, glorifying the epic struggle maintained by the tenacious and indomitable Belgians against Spanish despotism. Side by side with this 'national Bible', with these visions of the past magnified by the intensity of their expression, other writers reproduced with an almost excessive realism the scenes of everyday life. Among them was Camille Lemonnier, who excelled in rendering his impressions in strong colours and in bold relief. He wrote realistic novels in a rich vocabulary. In collaboration with the barrister, E. Picard, a writer who was always in the van, he prepared the movement from which resulted the 'Jeune Belgique'. At first, however, this movement was much influenced by the literary evolution of France, and appeared to follow in the track of the 'Parnassiens', devoted mainly to the form and choosing by preference words full of colour and splendid phrases. It was essentially a reaction against middle-class and out-of-date ideas. Such was the programme of the review, entitled *La Jeune Belgique*, founded by Max Waller, a poet and author of short stories, who died too young to give the full measure of his powers (d. 1889).

His associates, however, soon entered upon new paths and developed plastic powers of extraordinary exuberance and fire; showing themselves able to depict in vivid colours scenes of natural and of sensual life, they excelled in revealing

their impressions in violent colouring which at times bordered on the brutal. There soon arose a constellation of considerable poets in this land which had so long been hostile to cadence and rhyme. Maeterlinck, Le Roy, and Van Lerberghe revolted against the impersonal rigidity of the Parnassian school, and made symbolism predominant, translating their inmost feelings into words, and so taking up again in a large way the traditions of romanticism. But the special characteristic of the Belgian poets is that 'while they think with the heart, they still see with the eye; they paint as well as sing'. The most delicate in sentiment is Van Lerberghe: he loved Florence; it was there he composed his *Chanson d'Ève*—a fairy-like apotheosis of woman, the true symphony of grace, in which he seems to have been inspired by the Englishman, D. G. Rossetti. This 'poet of the ineffable' also created the theatre of pain, sinisterly symbolic, which was to be imitated by Maeterlinck. Verhaeren rejects all guidance. He has set forth in fairy phrases the visions of the past and has crystallized his sad sensibility in arresting forms, subtle and mysterious. He has glorified magnificently also the life of to-day; he has become the poet of modern reality, of industrial life; above all he has sung with barbaric outburst of sound and colour the 'Octopus Cities' and the 'Tumultuous Forces'. In powerful rhythms and in convulsed and broken verses, he exalted his native land at the moment when Germany, maker of darkness, transformed her into a field of battle.

Prose writers have also shared in the cult of their native land. Eekhout and Virrès celebrated the life of the country, and among others that of the Campine, shy and mysterious—always with the same predilection for form. Delattre has tenderly described the smiling Walloon land, with its cities always hospitable, and dwells especially on humble life, celebrating the 'radiant misery' of living. Others with malicious wit unfold

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scenes in the life of the *bourgeoisie*; others still have resuscitated tragic moments in their nation's past, the energy and heroic suffering of the towns and the rural districts. The language of these writers is rich and picturesque, instinct with the joy of living and of creating, of producing works of art. Rodenbach is the sole representative of a different temperament, and that little Flemish—by the morbid fascination which he exercises in his *Bruges la Morte*, a study of neurasthenic love. Maeterlinck has succeeded in expressing and in suggesting ideas and emotions which hitherto had found their interpretation rather in music. 'The unconscious self, or rather the subconscious self', says E. Verhaeren, 'recognized in the verse and prose of Maeterlinck its language, or rather its stammering attempt at language.' From the outset of his literary career, Maeterlinck settled in France, which he made his adopted country, and it is to French literary history that he more properly belongs.

Despite the extent and the richness of this literary renaissance, it was as nothing compared with the artistic revival by which it was accompanied. Belgium resumed that position in the world of art which she had occupied at all the decisive moments of her history. Numerous painters and sculptors acquired world-wide fame, reviving the realism of their predecessors, but at the same time displaying a marked individuality. Immediately after the revolution of 1830, there was nothing to foretell an artistic revival so wonderful and so rapid. Belgium, from the point of view of art, was no more than a French province. The same conflict as in France between declining neo-classicism and rising romanticism was visible there. Navez represented the first tendency in his portraits, vigorous but cold. On the other hand, Wappers was under the influence of triumphant romanticism and sought for theatrical effects in his great historical paintings; violent gesticulation, tragic faces, artificial light, mark his pictures.



Gallait pursued the same path, but paid more attention to technique ; he was, as has been said, ' magnificently mediocre in his art '. Leys also followed the same romantic tendencies ; he emancipated himself from them only somewhat later under the inspiration of the Bouts and the Metsys.

One of the salient characteristics of the artistic evolution of Belgium consists in the number of centres in which it developed. The chief were Antwerp, Ghent, and Brussels, but Liège and many other towns also produced artists of distinction. Hence the variety which shows itself in the Belgian school, which has also gradually asserted its originality. Yet side by side with this variety it has displayed a general tendency towards that realism which was so characteristic of the old Walloon and Flemish artists. This movement appears to have begun simultaneously from Ghent and Antwerp. Leys here revived the aesthetic traditions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by drawing with a marked sincerity and in marvellously fresh colours portraits of contemporaries in the surroundings of those ages. But he sometimes copied the errors in perspective which had been made by the old masters, and failed to achieve real decorative painting, which was best represented much later by Delbeke, the producer of the admirable frescoes in the halls of Ypres, which were destroyed in the course of the war. At Ghent, Félix De Vigne revived historical painting in his efforts to reproduce faithfully scenes of everyday life in the Middle Ages. He instructed in the art of realistic interpretation his pupils, such as De Winne, a vigorous and sober portraitist, and Jules Breton, the French master, who gave so strong an impulse to realistic tendencies in his own country and to whose success his Flemish relations seem to have contributed in no small measure.

Finally, at Brussels, the tendency towards the direct observation and faithful reproduction of nature was still further

accentuated, but in a somewhat French spirit. Like Courbet in France, de Groux painted the unhappy—interpreting sad, mournful, tragic realities; he created a new emotion, altogether pathetic, but his technique broke away from Flemish traditions; his grey and cold colouring contrasted with the bright and shining colours of his contemporaries.

The need for closer and closer communion with nature, for absorbing in a measure the open air, and at the same time for discovering new artistic formulæ which should be nearer truth, early attracted the Belgian artists to landscape. And in art of this type they excelled, displaying their best native characteristics—firmness in execution, richness in colouring, a taste for things material, solid, and rich.

The Ardennes and the Campine found many attentive interpreters, some of whom, such as Lamorinière, were even too meticulous, and they became the tracts specially affected by landscape painters after the new impulse given to Belgian art by H. Boulenger. In subtle and vigorous manner he expressed the very varied aspects of the lovely Brabançon district round Tervueren; he transferred into his works the silence of the forests, the murmurs of the plain. Side by side with the Tervueren school developed that of Termonde, the master of which, J. Rosseels, was especially devoted to the Campine heath with all its changing moods, full of contrasts and bathed in so enveloping an atmosphere. His pupils, I. Meyers and Crabeels, remained faithful to the region which, it may be recalled, inspired the first Flemish romance writer. Heymans and Artan excel in sea-pieces and in depicting river landscapes veiled in mist. Courtens surpassed his contemporaries in the vigour of his colouring and in his power of making scenes live.

I. Verheyden, at once a landscape and a portrait painter of talent, is distinguished for his acute and nervous power

of vision, brilliant colorization, broad and sure execution. E. Verdyen combined mirage and reality in his subtle and fresh sketches of the picturesque banks of the Meuse, which possess so impressive a charm, so deep a tranquillity.

To this brilliant group of landscape painters there were joined many animal painters, such as Verwee and Claus, the artists of pastoral Flanders, who also often excelled as landscape painters, and were equally distinguished for the richness of their colorization, liveliness of expression, robustness of outline and sympathetic vision. One of them, Claus, successfully inaugurated the art of 'luminisme' in Belgium, in imitation of Monet.

Sincere and vigorous portrait painters devoted their attention to the expression of the psychology of their models, supplying a further example of the increasing importance of the factor of observation in painting. Finally, a number of artists, abandoning traditional paths, created works of powerful originality and became so markedly individual that it is difficult to place them in any school or class. But almost all remained faithful to care in colouring, to strong delineation, to seeing and rendering in a convincing manner the life of men and things.

Belgian sculptors have not, like their brother artists, any national tradition to revive. They have thus had also greater difficulty in asserting their individuality and in freeing themselves from the imitation of foreign models. They underwent, at first, the influence of the leaders of the European schools and confined themselves almost entirely to neo-classic statuary. The first to break free from convention was P. De Vigne, a pupil of G. Vander Linden (who was also the master of P. Braecke, another delicate sculptor, the creator of exquisite figures of women and children). De Vigne was long resident in Florence, where he studied the masterpieces of the fifteenth

century. Drawing his inspiration from these, he produced a type of art really original, and wholly spontaneous ; he united the grace of Florence with the vigour of expression and plasticity of Flanders ; his marble, *l'Immortalité* in the Museum of Brussels, and his numerous busts and bas-reliefs of youths attract both by the sobriety of their lines and by their distinction and intensity of expression. Dillens followed analogous paths though adopting a style more akin to that of Rubens, while Lambeaux attempted to adapt to sculpture the traditions of the Flemish renaissance by exaggeration of movement and attitudes (as in the fountain of Brabo at Antwerp), although full of spirit, vigour, and brilliance.

C. Meunier, whose reputation has surpassed that of all those already mentioned, found a new style, worn but pathetic, to express the tragic grandeur of labour, the poetry of modern industry. At first a painter, he preserved in his sculptures a very pronounced tendency to reproduce colour and the contrasts of lights and shades. This is the explanation of his special fondness for the bas-relief, of which he was the undoubted master.

The artistic revival appeared equally in architecture at the time of the most intense industrial activity. After futile efforts to revive the Gothic, Belgian architects found their inspiration mainly in the Flemish renaissance and in the French architecture of the eighteenth century. But they combined all styles ; one of the most remarkable creations in this connexion is the Palais de Justice at Brussels of Poelaert, with its Babylonian dimensions and its mainly Doric-Roman *motifs*. The more frequent employment of iron in building led to a new style, the chief exponent of which is Horta. Finally, domestic architecture was inspired by all manner of models drawn from all lands and all ages, but mainly from the Flemish renaissance. It displayed extraordinary variety and



elegance in the new quarters of the great towns and in the holiday resorts on the sea-coast and in the Ardennes.

In addition to the plastic arts, music equally revived with vigour in the land of Roland de Lassus. Benoit eloquently translated into popular tunes the emotions of the masses, and Cesar Franck, the great master of Liège, in his wonderful lyrical productions, was one of the most delicate interpreters of contemporary sensibility. The numerous schools of music, all free like the academies or schools of the fine arts, largely contributed to refine the musical taste which seems to be innate in both Flemings and Walloons. Their folk-song has become famous as a result of the initiative of the municipalities and of such societies as the 'Société de littérature wallonne' and the 'Willemsfonds', which aims at raising the intellectual and moral level of the people by the medium of writing and song.

## *Independent Belgium during the Period of Expansion (1885-1914)*

### *i. Economic and Social Evolution*

As yet the third period of the life of independent Belgium does not really belong to history. It is hardly possible yet to determine the significance or estimate the relative importance of the events which took place in it. Of those events many would seem to indicate a movement in the direction of an increased solidarity in every part of national life and a simultaneous tendency to take a greater share in the general activities of mankind. No certainty, however, can as yet be reached on this point, since only movements which are completed can be properly comprehended; not those just beginning. Be that as it may, in all departments of social activity Belgium has shown a more intense vitality. In the domain of the intellect she has continued to exhibit a marked predilection for applied science, although she has produced men of marked ability in somewhat speculative spheres, such as history and international law. She has maintained in a marked degree that artistic and literary aptitude so signally displayed in the previous age. It is hard to distinguish the various currents of the general intellectual movement, and to decide which are destined to become of greater importance than others. Savants, no less than artists and writers, tend to become increasingly individualistic, to specialize more and more; and the result is that the task of forming a synthesis of contemporary intellectual evolution grows less and less easy. The very scope of this 'General Sketch' of Belgian history compels me to omit this

interesting subject, which would demand a disproportionate amount of space, and therefore induces me to refer to the few brief allusions in the previous chapter showing how this side of national life comes into contact with other sides.

In the economic and social sphere, Belgium, as has been said, has formed a veritable 'land of experiments'. Historically the country of individualism, she had to face the difficult problem of adapting that individualism to entirely new conditions of life. She proved, according to the testimony of foreign observers, that she possessed a really practical spirit, combined with unwearied energy and extraordinary adaptability.

Commercial prosperity continually grew, though in an irregular way. Statistics show conclusively the enhanced importance of Belgium in the economic world. The activity of the port of Antwerp, in which Germans occupied an important part, constantly increased, and the city benefited from its relations with the Congo, which made it a great market for ivory and rubber. The delay in perfecting the equipment of the port and the lack of adequate facilities for dealing with cargo, however, served to hamper Antwerp in its competition with Rotterdam, and the latter town advanced at the expense of the former.

Imports and exports increased to an unheard-of extent. The imports (special commerce) rose from an average of one and a half milliards of francs for the years 1881-90 to three milliards for the years 1901-10. In 1913 they amounted to five milliards. Exports rose from an average of one and a third milliards for the years 1881-90 to two and a half milliards for the years 1901-10. In 1913 they amounted to 3.7 milliards.

The transit trade acquired an extraordinary importance, and showed that Belgium maintained her position as a world market. The average value of this trade for the years 1881-90 was 1,364 millions, and although it declined during the ten years

ending 1900 to an average of 1,270 millions, it grew persistently from 1901 to 1913, reaching in the latter year the figure of 2,459 millions.

The development of the foreign exchanges and generally of all economic activity was greatly assisted by improved transport facilities. Belgium retained her position as the land best served by railways, the charges on which were kept at a very low figure owing to the fact that the great majority of the lines were worked by the government. The Belgian government adopted the principle of working the railways on a non-profit basis, regarding the lines as a public service. The passenger traffic was further increased by the introduction of season tickets, more especially for workmen, a practice which has also made the movement of labour easier than it is elsewhere.

In addition to the system of main lines, which presently amounted to some 4,600 kilometres, there were soon local lines with a length of over 3,300 kilometres. These local lines were constructed and worked by a group of capitalists who formed the *Société Générale des Chemins de Fer vicinaux*, with the co-operation of the State, the provinces, and the communes concerned. A large number of villages were thus linked together by light railways, and in consequence obtained with more ease machines, chemical manures, and all the materials and implements required for the new methods of agriculture. They were also brought into closer contact with the towns. The difference between town and country was diminished on the one hand by the continual movement to and fro of the rural labour utilized in the factories and works of the towns, and on the other by the removal, to districts which had been purely agricultural before, of large industrial enterprises. As a result, Belgium assumed a more and more original character. In no other land was the extension of



industrial life so happily combined with the partial maintenance of an individualist system of agriculture. Belgium, however, the classic land of the lesser *bourgeoisie*, saw the influence of that class gradually diminishing as a result of new economic factors.

Industry on a large scale tended to replace industry on a moderate or a small scale, as commerce on a large scale gradually replaced commerce on a moderate or small scale. Factories killed domestic workshops, as stores did the small shops.

The number of large industrial enterprises employing more than five hundred workmen increased from 1896 to 1901 to an astonishing extent, growing from 133 to 1,844. The number of workmen employed in these industries increased by 60 per cent. in the same period, from 100,000 to 160,000. The medium and small businesses diminished during this same period to such an extent that the total number was less in 1901 than it had been in 1896, and in the following years this tendency was further accentuated. It manifested itself especially in the vital industries, such as collieries, metal works, spinning and weaving mills, breweries, distilleries, and quarries.

The advance in large enterprises as against those conducted by individuals or on a small scale was due not only to the division of labour which made production more rapid and cheaper, but also to the association of allied undertakings. This phenomenon appeared more especially in the mining and metal industries, forms of production which are essentially divorced from the consumer. As a result of the combination of metal and coal works, further formidable concerns were created. The colliery proprietors had raised their prices without regard to the fluctuations in the metal market, and such metal establishments as those of Cockerill, Ougrée-Marihaye, and others, acquired coal-mines themselves and began to supply their own

fuel. Thanks to this development they were able to meet the competition of German imported goods, which had become very acute owing to the prevalence of dumping. The zinc industry had been practically monopolized by the Vieille Montagne Company, which possessed foundries, rolling-mills, factories for blanching zinc, furnaces for its calcination, &c., distributed in various countries.

The decline of the lesser or bourgeois industry was inevitable; only feeble efforts were made by the government and local authorities to preserve it. The Catholic ministries which were in power during the whole of this period (1884-1914) were, however, especially interested in the lesser *bourgeoisie*. They encouraged the leagues and the congresses organized on its behalf, and appointed a commission to inquire into the whole situation. Subventions were granted to assist the purchase of mechanical appliances by the small and moderate businesses. Various towns also seconded the efforts of the lesser *bourgeoisie*; for example, by the creation of professional schools. Nevertheless the number of small employers constantly declined; they hardly saw their way to unite and to find in co-operation a means of remedying a situation which grew daily more precarious.

As everywhere happens, the great establishments, by collecting together masses of workmen, had given rise to unions amongst them, which supplied the starting-point of a reaction against the economic individualism which had existed since the French Revolution.

The Socialist movement in Belgium originated from two manufacturing centres, Ghent and the district of Liège. In the first of these towns, it led to the formation of economic groups which in turn produced the creation of co-operative societies; in the area of Liège, it translated itself into strikes meant to secure immediate political reforms calculated to

improve the lot of the workers. But the common aim of all the Socialists was primarily the complete transformation of economic organization, and the programme of the Socialists of Ghent, the concentration of capital in the hands of the workers united in co-operative societies, triumphed by reason of its practical character.

The first attempts at co-operation at Ghent had been made in 1857, when the Fraternal Society of Weavers had been established as the first group of the Ghent section of the International. It was gradually detected and run down by the authorities, for associations against employers were at that time prohibited by law. Three years later, however, the metal workers joined them. After the crisis produced by the American civil war, a large number of workers left the Fraternal Society of Weavers; the movement declined for several years, despite the abolition of the interdict upon combinations. Strikes were rare, doubtless owing to the fact that prosperity increased, especially after the Franco-German War. In 1874, however, a federation of societies of workmen with socialist tendencies was formed at Brussels, and soon the Ghent section of the International, founded in 1867, was reconstituted. In 1880 Anseele with some friends organized a co-operative society which became a real capitalistic power, the Vooruit. It was primarily a bakehouse, but various shops were added to it, dealing in groceries, clothes, boots, drugs, &c., and finally a weaving mill, a printing shop, and various workshops. The co-operative movement also founded a journal and established a library, and a hall for meetings and entertainments; it even engaged in life assurance and supplied all kinds of benefits to its members. Following the example of the society at Ghent, numbers of similar bodies were created at other towns. The Maison du Peuple at Brussels (1886) became the most important bakery in the country.

The co-operative movement thus promoted the concentra-

tion of capital, and in this way it was essentially different from the corporate movements of the Middle Ages, which left to the various masters the free disposal of their private capital. The mutual aid societies and professional associations were much more like the mediaeval craft guilds, and unions of this kind long endured at Liège, Verviers, and in the industrial areas of Hainault. In the Charleroi district the professional unions were affiliated not to the Labour party, that is to the Socialist party, but to the Knights of Labour of the United States.

By degrees the system of consumptive and productive co-operation spread to the Walloon districts also, where the co-operators were organized by the Socialist party and grouped together into federations. Each federation remained self-governing in the economic sense, but depended on the general council of the Socialist party in the matter of political propaganda.

For several years some of the foremost members of the Catholic party had been occupied with endeavours to discover some solution of the new social problems by means of organizations of a religious character, as had been the former workmen's corporations. In Germany trade associations of this nature had been in some measure reconstituted, although they were strictly under the control of the government or the municipal authorities. The Catholic party did not at first have recourse to such organizations.

In opposition to the socialistic co-operative societies, the party created Catholic co-operative societies, which met with success only in certain towns, Ghent, Louvain, and Antwerp. On the other hand they spread rapidly in the agricultural districts, and on all sides there appeared co-operative creameries, and associations on co-operative lines for the purchase of the primary needs of agriculture.



At first in many rural areas the curé became the chief agent, the working manager, of these co-operative bodies, but by degrees there appeared an increasing tendency to leave the initiative to the members themselves. Father Rutten preached the system of allowing the workmen to direct the institutions which had been established or which it was proposed to establish for them, and from that moment the Catholic syndicates and the numbers of their members increased until in a few years they numbered about half as many as the socialistic syndicates.

In order to escape the influence of the syndicates of workmen and to get cheaper labour, a certain number of men of business established factories in the country; chimneys became as numerous, though not so thickly planted, in the Flemish districts as they were in the industrial Walloon area. Bit by bit these rural workmen were in their turn to follow the example of the workers in the towns, and to organize themselves for the defence of their collective interests. So there was formed a mixed proletariat, half agricultural, half industrial, mainly in consequence of the enormous extension of the sugar industry.

The substitution of beetroot and of garden products such as cauliflowers, chicory, grapes, &c., for cereals, the return for which was inadequate owing to foreign competition, led to a veritable revolution in agriculture. The extension of the growing of beetroot took place at the expense of that of food-stuffs, such as beans, and of industrial plants, such as flax. But after 1880 the cultivation of cereals became very unremunerative, and there has been a rapid increase in the growing of beetroot (of the types suitable for sugar, fodder, and distilling), which sometimes resulted in over-production, as in 1900. The results of this form of cultivation affected all other forms of agricultural activity; by obliging the peasants to employ

powerful fertilizers, to turn up the soil to a considerable depth and to free it carefully from weeds, it gave the cultivators a professional education as well as improving the soil. One result amongst others was an increase in the production of potatoes and oats and of other grain suitable for feeding stock. This similarly led to an increase in the number of cattle raised—a pursuit already favoured by the cultivation of beetroot.

The exploitation of pasture-land also became very profitable, and at the same time horse-breeding was introduced, the best animals being generally purchased by Germany. The head of Belgian cattle so increased that the country became proportionately the richest in Europe in this regard. Agricultural production was also so intensified that Belgium attained the first rank in this field also. This was especially the case in Flanders, where the population devoted itself to making the country more fertile, despite the harshness of nature. Meanwhile the variety of cultivation tended to guarantee the agriculturist against the crises which periodically overtake a particular form of activity. Unfortunately the available labour was hardly sufficient: besides the different industries of Belgium itself, foreign countries, especially France, attracted away a large number of agricultural labourers; it is true, however, that many of them confined themselves to migrating during the season, and returned home after it.

The economic and social changes of this period have occurred mainly in connexion with the formation and distribution of movable wealth; real property has been little affected. Cultivation on a small scale has remained the general system, but land is, as a rule, let to the cultivator. Only some 31 per cent. of the cultivated area of the country is exploited directly by the owners, leaving 69 per cent., some two-thirds, exploited by farmers, a proportion which is almost three and a half times as great as the proportion in France, and over four times

as great as the proportion in Germany. Moreover, a very large number of the small proprietors have been obliged to mortgage their land in order to meet their ever-increasing expenses. The holders of properties of moderate size have been the class most affected by the economic revolution of the period. Down to 1895 the number of such proprietors remained almost stationary; during the next decade it suddenly declined by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. The subdivision of properties has increased the number of small resident or proprietary cultivators. Cultivation on a large scale has increased very little; large agricultural undertakings are common only in Walloon Brabant and in the province of Namur. Belgian agriculture, therefore, has not been industrialized by the concentration of lands in a few hands. This phenomenon, which is characteristic of the beginning of the twentieth century, is the result of co-operation and syndicalization.

Some of these agricultural undertakings have been the result of private initiative, as for example the mutual insurance institutions against mortality among beasts and horses, dairies, sugar refineries, and co-operative distilleries, the Raiffeisen banks (local societies for loans and credit supplying capital to agriculturists), syndicates buying in common—these syndicates being grouped in federations, three Flemish and four Walloon, the most important being situated at Louvain, where it was established in 1890.<sup>1</sup> Other institutions were created by the government, agricultural banks founded by the minister Graux, and agricultural committees, the creation of which dates back to 1848.

The union of productive power and of the means of production has had great effects, not only on the economic life of the country but also on its social organization.

<sup>1</sup> In 1908 these syndicates had 41,701 members, grouped in 506 associations.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the social evolution of the quarter-century prior to the war has been the radical transformation of poor relief, which is no longer based exclusively on charity as in the past, but more and more on the conception of national solidarity.

The Englishman, Seebohm Rowntree, was struck in the course of his inquiry into the organization of labour in Belgium by the vast number of charitable institutions, and by the religious or political character of the majority of them. They disposed sometimes of considerable resources, but were devoted mainly rather to the relief of distress than to the examination of its causes. Their action was thus rather palliative than curative, and in some cases, especially in Flanders, they 'break down the manly independence of the people'. On the other hand, the obligation to conform to the practice of religion imposed by institutions of confessional tendencies, as by that of Saint Vincent de Paul, inclined to produce hypocrisy.

The situation has been somewhat modified by the growth of the democratic movement and by the greater part taken in public affairs by the lower class. The assistance granted to school children in the form of food, clothes, &c., by the communal bodies of the towns is more and more distributed on a principle of strict equality and with no distinction either of religion or political opinion.

One of the most fertile experiments in the domain of public assistance was taken by the communal council of the city of Ghent, which in 1900 established a communal out-of-work fund to supplement the efforts made by the workmen themselves against unemployment. All the great syndicates of workmen, Socialist, Catholic, Liberal, non-party, were affiliated to this, and the result of the undertaking was so satisfactory that the example was followed by various other towns, by six provinces, by the government, and by a certain number of industrial



centres abroad. The municipal autonomy, jealously preserved in Belgium, thus produced one really beneficial result.

*ii. The Catholic-Conservative Government*

In 1884 the Catholic party succeeded to power with a programme of frank opposition to the extension of State intervention, to laicism, and to militarism. It aimed at restraining within the narrowest possible limits the action of the government and of the civil authorities in general in the domains of education and charity, at increasing the influence of the Church, and if not at the actual reduction, at least at the prevention of any augmentation of the military establishment.

The first ministry of the party, however, lost its ultra-clerical character in the course of a few months, Woeste and Jacobs being forced to resign as a result of the demonstrations directed against them in the chief towns. Woeste nevertheless continued to inspire the majority of the cabinets and remained the real leader of the Right until 1909.

His brief ministry had been especially marked by radical measures directed to the reduction to the absolute minimum of the State educational establishments and to placing those establishments as much as possible under the indirect control of the Church. The law of 1884 introduced a system of recognized schools side by side with those of the State; private schools were enabled to obtain subsidies from the government if they conformed to certain regulations. This system was afterwards still further developed, and by degrees the private schools were subsidized almost in the same way as the public. The Catholic party, however, failed to induce the State to deprive itself entirely of its share in the work of education, and to give the Church that preponderating influence which it had enjoyed during the first twenty years of Belgian independence, that is, during the Catholic-Liberal government.

In face of the so-called free ecclesiastical institutions, which received among others the monks and nuns later expelled from France, the educational institutions of the State and of the great towns maintained the tradition of an essentially secular education, based upon neutrality, that is, upon respect for all shades of opinion. The influence of the Church on the educational institutions of the State, as for example its indirect intervention in the appointment of professors and masters, daily increased, although it was never sufficient to give them a confessional character. In this regard, it may be said that the Catholic party remained, despite itself, faithful to its official designation of 'Conservative'.

On the other hand, the party was led by force of circumstances to depart completely from its Conservative programme and to abandon the majority of those political traditions by which it had been characterized. It advanced by degrees towards that centralization which it had so strenuously resisted, and an important section within it, the *Jeune Droite*, inclined towards democratic reforms and even on occasion made common cause with the opposition parties.

In any case the Catholic ministries were forced, it would appear, to carry out or to continue many articles of the former Liberal programme, and in the first instance with regard to the settlement of labour questions, which became a matter of urgency from 1885. The economic unrest which followed on the years of industrial development drew the attention of ministers ever more and more towards social problems. Beernaert in 1885 ordered an inquiry into the organization of labour. The speech from the throne in the following year adumbrated a series of reforms in the direction of State intervention, such as the formation of professional unions, councils of arbitration, councils of conciliation, the regulation of labour, &c. This was the starting-point of important social

legislation, the application of which was sometimes hindered by the wish to limit the sphere of State intervention.

The Catholic party only ventured slowly and with hesitation upon the path of intervention. In 1887 the truck system was prohibited by law, as was the payment of wages in the inns. Under the Liberal ministry of Frère-Orban a law had already abolished the compulsory registration books of workmen (1883). In 1888 and 1889 various laws regulated the labour of women and children in factories and mines, but the numerous exceptions which were permitted in practice—more especially in the glass and sugar industries—rendered these regulations of little effect.

It was at this time that the reforming movement was supported by a new party, which, while declaring its fidelity to the Church, demanded a greater measure of social justice and put forward as one of the means by which such justice could be secured a more equitable distribution of wealth. The leader of this movement was the Abbé Pottier of Liège. He recruited numerous followers among the younger clergy and with the support of his bishops organized the Belgian Democratic League. Christian democracy soon found another apostle in an important manufacturing centre, Alost, the very city which had chosen as its representative Woeste, the leader of the Catholic-Conservative party. The new apostle was Abbé Daens, but he soon became suspect with the higher clergy and more especially with the head of his diocese, the Bishop of Ghent, who eventually suspended him and placed him under an interdict. The school of Liège itself, although claiming to be sanctioned by the encyclical of Leo XIII on the condition of the workers (1891), was declared to be revolutionary.

The social question, in addition to producing the disruption of the former Catholic party, produced almost as complete a schism in the ranks of the former Liberal party. The

Progressives detached themselves more and more from those Liberals who represented essentially the middle class and remained faithful to the ideal of the greatest possible measure of liberty. Thus a neo-progressive party was formed, which adhered to the doctrine of international Socialism and tended to coalesce with the Labour party. The latter party produced so great an agitation, rather by the threat of a general strike than by actual strikes, that in 1892 it was decided to revise the constitution in order to extend the franchise. The chambers, chosen to effect this revision, did not support wholeheartedly the doctrine of universal suffrage, the less so as they were themselves the representatives of the former electoral system. They eventually adopted in 1893—as a result of the union of the two extreme parties—a mixed system, that of the plural vote, by which the franchise was granted to all citizens who fulfilled certain requirements as to residence, and a supplementary vote was accorded—up to a maximum of three—to wealth, capacity, and family. One important innovation was the establishment of the compulsory vote.

The elections, held under the new system in 1894, completely changed the character of the chambers. From this time, there were three main parties: the Catholics, who possessed a substantial majority; the Socialists; and the Liberals, the last named standing midway between the first two and suffering very severely in the political conflicts of the last few years. The extreme factions, the Socialists and a section of the Catholics, represented the lower classes, and gave the debates in the parliament a more irregular character and a more heated atmosphere. Some years later, in 1899, the Liberal party revived in importance as a result of the introduction of proportional representation, and the violence of parliamentary debates was somewhat reduced, although the orientation of government policy was scarcely modified.



From the moment of the appearance of the Socialists in the chambers, the government took the initiative in the introduction of measures designed to regulate the relations between workmen and employers, and entered resolutely upon the path of State intervention. In 1895 a ministry of Labour was established, increasing still further the bureaucracy which had constantly developed in other departments of the government since centralization began to make progress.

The Catholic government, however, pursued a policy of decentralization in the matter of education in order to increase the social influence of the Church, and a law of 1895 granted to 'free', that is, Catholic, schools regular subsidies. The policy of the government was inspired by the principle defined by the leader of the old party of the Right in the following terms: 'Education is not a public service; it is the function of the father, not of the State.' The old fight over the schools continued, and the Liberals united with the Socialists to oppose the pretensions of the Church, which aimed at monopolizing the direction of the conscience—the bishops had already, with this end in view, succeeded in establishing by law compulsory religious instruction, unless exemption from it was formally demanded. Primary education did not become compulsory until 1913. Between 1895 and 1900 a series of laws were passed for the regulation of labour, these enactments having as their purpose the control of the relations between employers and employees. But this control was not in general as vigorous as that exercised in similar cases in other countries. It was established as a principle that the legislator ought not to create rights, but to explain and define them. Thus the Belgian laws of 1896 on the regulation of workshops, and that of 1900 on contracts for labour, were preceded by careful inquiries intended to conciliate all the interests concerned to the greatest possible extent. The law fixed a standard contract

in cases where the conditions of labour were not defined by the contracting parties, but permitted its modification by the advice of the trade council and by the labour inspectors. Thus, while leaving employer and employed free to enter into mutual engagements according to the customary conditions of the district, the government desired to establish the principle that every one, apart from his private interest, has his duties and responsibilities.

The employees of the great industries, however, continued to demand reforms in order to improve the lot of the workers. In 1897 and 1898 the government passed a law on the subject of the inspection of mines, under which State inspectors and also inspectors representing the workmen were created, these being selected by the coal sections of the councils of industry and labour. The Socialists protested against this method of choice, and demanded that the inspectors representing the workmen should be selected by the workmen themselves. They therefore termed this law a 'loi de façade'. The Socialists further complained that the number of inspectors was insufficient.

As a result further laws were soon passed and decrees issued for the regulation of labour. In 1903 the Workmen's Compensation Act, for injuries, &c., was passed, and in 1905 a royal decree restricted the hours of work for children under thirteen to six per diem. In the same year a law limiting the working days for all operatives to six per week was passed, excepting in cases where special exemptions were granted. These exemptions were numerous. The law with regard to the limitation of the working day in mines (1906-7) gave rise to very lively debates.

The government did not dare to introduce compulsory insurance for old age pensions, but was content to encourage providence by granting pensions to workers who were either

members of the public benefit society or of some recognized society for mutual aid, and with granting a small pension to operatives who found themselves in want when over the age of sixty-five years. Improvidence was thus reduced, but not abolished. The government brought in a law for compulsory insurance for miners, and this produced criticism on the part of workers in other industries, such as the glassworkers, who regarded even the miners as functionaries.

The accession of the lower classes to a share in public affairs had a further effect in producing changes in linguistic legislation. At the revolution of 1830 French became the only official language; Rogier and other statesmen of the period thought that unity of language was indispensable for administrative organization and that it would contribute to the consolidation of the country. Since that date, however, certain Flemish municipalities had semi-officially adopted the language of their inhabitants, and in 1866 the city of Antwerp had even declared that Flemish—otherwise known as the Netherlands tongue—would henceforth be the official language. On the other hand, as the exclusive employment of French in the courts had given rise to certain mistakes in cases where the defendant was ignorant of that tongue, the chambers in 1873 adopted a measure providing that the charge and pleadings in criminal cases should be in the language of the accused. Other laws still further extended the employment of Flemish in judicial matters in the Flemish-speaking districts. But the language of the central administration remained exclusively French down to the time when the legislature raised Flemish to the position of an official language. Some years after the introduction of universal plural voting, the number of communal and provincial councillors and of deputies who were either ignorant of French or knew it very badly increased in the Flemish districts, and the propaganda in favour of 'Flemish'

reforms grew to such an extent that a majority, containing representatives of the three parties, adopted a measure in 1898 which declared that Flemish was an official tongue on the same basis as French, and that all future laws should be drawn up in both languages. The linguistic situation in the Flemish area remained very abnormal, because an important section of the *bourgeoisie* continued to employ mainly French, and showed great reluctance to learn thoroughly the language of the lower orders. A law of 1883 attempted to remedy this state of things by ordering that Flemish should be the language used in part of the educational course in all secondary schools, to wit, in the study of the Germanic tongues and in two other courses. But this law was only imperfectly carried out and higher education remained still essentially French. At the time when the war broke out, a new policy was taking shape, the policy of organizing in the State universities courses given both in French and Flemish.

### *iii. Colonial Expansion*

As early as the reign of Leopold I various attempts at colonial expansion had been made in order to compensate the country for the closing of the Dutch colonies to its commerce. In 1841 an expedition was undertaken to the Rio Nuñez, and seven years later a protectorate was established there, but the government ceased to maintain it in 1856. A Belgian colonization company, formed in 1841, transported a certain number of emigrants to Guatemala, but they failed to become acclimatized and in a short time the settlement disappeared. Further attempts made in Brazil, at São Thomé, Santa Catharina, and São Paulo, met with no greater success. But as the markets of Europe became more and more restricted, the need for colonial outlets became increasingly imperative. Belgian



capitalists preferred to employ their resources in industrial enterprises in European countries ; they formed a large number of companies for the exploitation of mines, factories, railways in Spain, Italy, and Russia, wherever they saw possibilities of industrial development. Their investments everywhere lacked security from the mere fact that they were in foreign lands ; only gradually did they appreciate the advantages of colonial dependencies.

As early as 1855, Leopold II, who was then only Duke of Brabant, delivered a speech in the Senate in which he pointed out the urgency of finding new openings for the industry and activity of Belgium. At first he hoped to find them in the Far East and in Egypt. Between the years 1855 and 1860, the Belgian government attempted to obtain a concession at the mouth of the Yangtse-kiang, but without success. The project of founding a settlement in Formosa was then formed, but this scheme was no more successful. Then in 1876 the interior of Africa began to be known, thanks to the expeditions of Cameron and the publication of Livingstone's journals. Leopold II at once turned his attention to this quarter ; he foresaw the future of these vast areas in the Dark Continent, which had so long remained wrapped in mystery.

In 1876 he assembled at Brussels forty geographers and travellers of different lands with the object of co-ordinating efforts to solve the African problem, of freeing the negroes from slavery and ' of opening at last to civilization the only part of our globe which has not yet been penetrated '. At first the idea was an international undertaking. The international African Association, formed in the following year, organized several expeditions to Lake Tanganyika from Zanzibar ; six expeditions, mostly directed by Belgian officers, went out between 1877 and 1883. The Comité d'Études du Haut

Congo, created in 1878 under the honorary presidency of the king, accomplished a more considerable work than the association. Its mission was not merely humanitarian and scientific, but political and economic. The king ably calmed the greed of the colonial powers by declaring that the most absolute commercial freedom should prevail in the new state, and that 'the basin of the Congo should become as it were the common heritage of all nations'. With the help of Stanley, aided by Belgian soldiers, he secured the recognition of his authority by numerous chiefs of the Congo district, from the mouth of the river to the Stanley Falls. Become a sovereign power, the committee took the title of Association internationale du Congo (1883). Its work was opposed by France and Portugal, the latter being supported by England. The French flag was planted by Brazza on the right bank of the Pool and barred Stanley's march. On the other hand, Portugal claimed the lower course of the river on the ground of historic rights, and her pretensions were favoured by England. But thanks to the able diplomacy of the king, the other powers welcomed with sympathy the foundation of the new state. The Association came to terms with France, with which country it concluded an agreement which gave France preferential rights in the event of the Association desiring to dispose of its possessions. After lengthy negotiations the association finally obtained from Portugal authorization to take possession of a corridor essential to give it access to the sea. Meanwhile, the new state had been recognised first by the United States of America, and later by Germany and the other powers in the course of a diplomatic conference held at Berlin (1884-5). This conference decreed that there should be freedom of trade in the area which it described as the 'conventional basin of the Congo' and liberty of settlement for all; it laid down special provisions for combating the slave-trade, and also proclaimed

freedom of navigation on the Congo, Niger, and their tributaries. It was then that Leopold II, with the authority of the chambers, and in accord with the Association internationale du Congo, assumed the title of sovereign of the Congo Free State. In the message which he sent on this occasion to the chambers, he announced that the Congo, like Belgium, would enjoy the benefits of neutrality. In a few years Leopold II had created, with the help of some Belgian officers and capitalists among others, an empire of which the area was equal to eighty times that of Belgium and the population more than twice that of Belgium, and which held forth hopes of a rich future ; its resources in ivory and rubber were at once exploited, and perhaps too hastily.

Commercial activity developed as a result of the building of a railway designed to avoid the district of the Cataracts. Begun in 1890, it was completed, despite many difficulties, eight years later, and at once brought in splendid returns. On the other hand, the costs of administering the state were partly covered by import duties imposed after a revision of the article of the Berlin Act which related to free importation for the first twenty years. But the general resources of the state were inadequate despite the advances made by Belgium, and on the advice of Captain Coquilhat, who was later vice-governor, Leopold II entirely modified the economic system. He took steps to preserve for the state the disposal of all natural products, more especially of rubber and ivory (1891). In a short time almost the whole district was exploited directly by the state or by companies to which the sovereign granted concessions. The natives were left only the use of such land as they had cultivated in 1885, at a time when the greater part of the Congo was unexplored ; they were thus confined within narrow limits and compelled to pay a tax in kind. In this way the rubber-producing areas passed almost entirely into the

hands of the state or of such companies as the state approved, since the greater part of these lands had not been worked in 1885. All lands declared unoccupied were ultimately divided in the following way: (1) The 'domaine privé', converted after 1906 into the 'domaine national', from which the sovereign drew the revenues applied to meet public charges; (2) the 'domaine de la Couronne', which comprised the richest part of the Congo and which was separated from the 'domaine privé'; the revenues of this portion were devoted to public works and institutions of general utility, both in Belgium and in the Congo; and (3) the lands granted as concessions to the great commercial companies, such as those of Kassai, Comptoir Commercial, Mongala, and Abir. The excesses of which some of the agents of these companies were guilty compelled the state under the pressure of public opinion to put an end to their operations. But the agents of the state themselves, being interested in increasing the returns resulting from the labour imposed upon the natives, owing to the fact that they received a percentage of the profit, often abused their power. In default of legislation on the matter, they themselves fixed the amount of the tax, and effected its collection in any way they pleased. Despite everything the natives living in the rubber-producing areas continued to be overburdened with forced labour, and the agents resorted to every means to make up the amount of the tax. Vigorous protests were made in England, where the press began an energetic campaign against the system prevailing in the Congo. Sir Charles Dilke even demanded that the government of England should take the initiative in calling an international conference with a view to taking steps with regard to the treatment of the natives. The proposal was adopted by the House of Commons in 1903. It was then that R. Casement, English consul at Boma, was instructed by his govern-



ment to conduct an inquiry in the Upper Congo, the report resulting from which in general confirmed the criticisms which had been brought against the Free State. Leopold II finally decided to order an inquiry himself; it resulted, in a somewhat modified form, in a complete indictment of the administration of the Congo. The sovereign loyally recognized the reality of the abuses which his administration and that of the companies had committed, but he deceived himself as to their cause. His administration itself was a vast commercial undertaking; its officials were commercial agents. This confusion of duties rendered futile all the humanitarian regulations issued by the sovereign. Urgent reforms were needed. Public opinion in Belgium loudly demanded them, and on various sides it was suggested that the best method of effecting them would be the conversion of the Congo into a Belgian colony. As early as 1889, Leopold II had left the Free State by will to Belgium, but he did not show any disposition to cede it at once without burdening his gift with onerous charges, such as the reservation of the royal domain. The House of Commons refused to agree to these demands, while on the other hand the British government continued to press for a complete transformation of the Congo. After long negotiations, Leopold II at last agreed to give up his claims with regard to the royal domain (1908) and the Congo became a Belgian colony. From that moment the Belgian parliament exercised effective control over the government of the Congo by means of the vote for the colonial budget. The acts of the sovereign had in future to be countersigned by a minister responsible to parliament. The supreme administration was entrusted to a special minister for the colonies, who was assisted by a colonial council, the members of which were named partly by the king and partly by the chambers. The Congo was still regulated by its

particular laws, and its administration remained absolutely distinct from that of Belgium proper.

The Belgian government published a very definite declaration as to its resolve to fulfil scrupulously all the obligations resulting from international conventions, and more especially from the Treaty of Berlin. It further declared that it would speedily take measures to end forced labour in the colony. Nevertheless it continued to be the subject of violent attacks on the part of certain English writers, such as Morel and other representatives of the Congo Reform Association. The disappearance of the Leopoldine system was, however, an accomplished fact.

#### *iv. National Defence*

The organization of national defence had been the subject of very special consideration as early as the first years of the reign of Leopold II (1865-1909). It continued to be for him a matter of the first importance, and he never ceased to press it upon the attention of parliament. The development at the gates of Belgium of the formidable German Empire inspired him with a lively apprehension, which he showed by the insistence with which he urged the defence of the line of the Meuse. He succeeded in obtaining this from the chambers in 1887, at a time when relations between France and Germany were strained as a result of the Boulangist agitation, but he failed to secure the increase of the standing army necessitated by such an extension of the defensive system. At all times, and particularly on the occasion of any patriotic manifestation, he made such an increase the subject of pressing recommendations, one of the most sensational occasions being the speech which he delivered at Bruges in 1887, at the time of the unveiling of the monument to Breydel and de Coninc, the heroes of 1302. 'The lion of Flanders', he said, 'ought not

to sleep. The noble heritage of which you are justly proud will exist and will grow unceasingly by the constant cultivation of virile sentiments and by keeping the sacred fire of patriotism alive. All liberty is born and dies with independence. That is the lesson written on every page of our history.'

The anti-militarists, numerous in the ranks of the Catholic party, appealed to the guarantee of Belgian neutrality by the powers. Wiser heads pointed out that this guarantee was essentially precarious, and rested in effect upon an understanding between the powers; once the equilibrium was disturbed, Belgian neutrality would be seriously menaced.

Leopold II did not cease to recommend with unflagging zeal the military question to the care of parliament. He gave indirect support to the campaign against substitution which General Brassine undertook in 1897 during his short term of office. But the majority of the Right was unflinchingly hostile to any increase in military expenditure. The *Jeune Droite* alone showed itself inclined to join the majority of the Left in strengthening the national defences. The propaganda undertaken by Brialmont in favour of universal service, and encouraged by the king, failed owing to the inertia of the ministry, which was anxious to maintain the union of the various groups of the Right. The government was at the mercy of Woeste, the leader of the old Right, and attempted to increase the effectives of the army by offering various advantages to volunteers. It passed a law to this effect; in two years the volunteers tripled in number, but then their numbers declined rapidly. Despite the failure of the voluntary system, ministers who succeeded to office did not dare to attempt military reform.

In the course of the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of national independence (1905), the king did not hesitate to insist on the urgent need for the reconstruction of the fortifications of Antwerp, the basis of the defensive system.

This reconstruction involved an expenditure of more than a hundred millions. It was voted in the following year and completed soon afterwards by a reform of the artillery. From that time army reform became absolutely necessary ; it was essential to raise the effectives to a number which should be in accord with the importance of the fortresses which were to be defended. At this time, under the voluntary system, the number of men with the colours had fallen from 42,000 in 1901 to 36,000 in 1907. The chamber appointed a commission which recognized the failure of voluntary service, but showed great difference of opinion as to the system which should be introduced. Finally Schollaert, Prime Minister in 1909, evolved a mixed system, that of one son per family, which was a step towards universal service. His scheme was adopted, thanks to the union in this matter of the *Jeune Droite* with the parties of the Left, and thanks in part also to the influence of the king. Leopold II, on his death-bed, secured by his personal intervention a favourable vote in the Senate after that in the chamber. Always the foremost of patriots, he had the supreme satisfaction of leaving Belgium strongly armed and capable of arming herself still better in face of external peril. The reform of 1909 definitely abolished substitution, and was thus of considerable social importance. All citizens who were in the position determined by the law were in future on the same footing as far as concerned their duty to their fatherland.

In 1913 the chambers increased the contingent, with the result that the army would have amounted in 1918 to 350,000 men, half of whom would have composed the field army. Before this measure came into effect, Belgium was called upon to face the most formidable military power in the world. For purely strategic reasons, Prussia without hesitation violated that neutrality which she had been the first officially to propose in 1831. But little Belgium was able to show that she was not



ripe for slavery, and to justify the words used by Leopold II in his inaugural speech, 'I have always regarded the future of Belgium with the confidence which is inspired by a nation free, honourable, and brave, which wills its independence, which has known how to conquer it and to show itself worthy of it, and will know how to guard it'.

The whole nation ranged itself round King Albert in face of the invader, and showed its unbreakable resolution to 'preserve intact the sacred patrimony of its ancestors'. The two chambers unanimously approved the proud attitude of the king, and in their memorable sitting of August 4, 1914, sanctioned the answer to the German ultimatum, which the king himself explained in these terms: 'If we are called upon to resist the invasion of our soil and to defend our threatened hearths, this duty, hard as it may be, will find us armed and ready to endure the greatest sacrifices. Everywhere in Flanders and the Walloon land, in the towns and in the country, one sole feeling fills all hearts, patriotism; one sole thought occupies all minds, our threatened independence; one sole duty imposes itself on our wills, obstinate resistance.'



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\* *For such names as De Vigne, De La Marck, Van Dyck, Vander Noot, &c., see Vigne, Marck, Dyck, Noot, &c.*

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